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Cambridge House, High Street, Fulham, W., March 19, 1884.

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YRS truly,

THOMAS KENNETH.

[Copy testimonial from the late CAPTAIN WEBB.]

Adelphi Terrace, Strand, W., August 15th, 1875.

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opportunity of making known to all my friends the excellence and virtue of your most powerful & specific. I think it is incumbent on you, and a duty you owe to the public at large, to let them know by all means in your power the wonderful health-restoring remedy for all ailments you possess.—With many thanks for the service you have been to me, yours faithfully,
M. WEBB.

Merrion Square, Dublin, June 3rd, 1884.

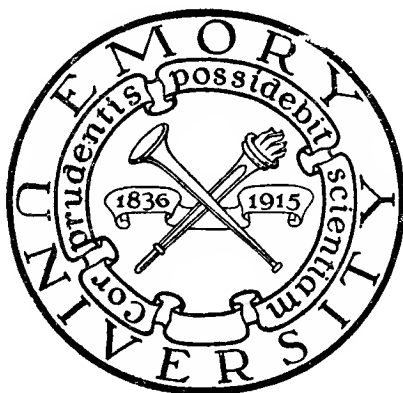
To Mr. McDONALD, 3 Rupert Street, London, W.

Sir,—I am much obliged for the half-gallon of Porpoise Liver Oil received this morning. My wife has been so much benefited by the quart you had previously sent, that she has ordered a larger supply this time, as she intends giving some to the children. I am thankful to say she sleeps better and eats better, and has gained a considerable amount in weight; her cough is very much better, and the blood-spitting has ceased. I forgot to tell you that her father died of consumption at the age of thirty years. My wife desires me to thank you—I remain, yours obediently,
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I'll none of it."—*Shakespeare.*

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SKITTLES IN PARIS.

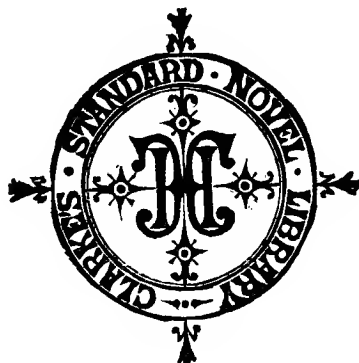
SKITTLES IN PARIS

A

Biography of a "Fascinating Woman"

BY THE AUTHOR OF

SKITTLES—LEFT HER HOME—DEILAH—KATE HAMILTON—ANONYMA
AGNES WILLOUGHBY—THE SOILED DOVE—THE LADY DETECTIVE—
LOVE FROLICS OF A YOUNG SCAMP—INCOGNITA—FORMOSA
—THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON—ANNIE.



LONDON: CHARLES HENRY CLARKE,
7 GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET STREET.

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SKITTLES IN PARIS

CHAPTER I.

"THE" LARAQUEZ.

"I SAY, old fellow, look here," exclaimed a lady, who although past the period of life called *la jeunesse*, was still marvellously pretty.

She was reclining in a *fauteuil* with an air of easy *abandon*. The apartment was richly furnished. The remains of a breakfast à *la fourchette* were upon the table.

The lady was known by the playful appellation of Skittles—a name sufficiently famous to need little comment. The house in which she was staying was the celebrated Hotel B——, one of the best in Paris.

Her remark was addressed to a handsome young Frenchman, who was very rich and remarkably foolish. His name was Laraquez, and he was a noble of France, not of the Second Empire, but descended from a long line of ancestors, whose creation, so heraldic records said, dated back as far as the days of Charlemagne, or those of King Pepin.

The Comte de Laraquez was an accomplished scholar and a polished gentleman ; he could talk English as well as French. Skittles was Madame la Comtesse in that peculiar manner known in France as *la main gauche*. She had in the language of the students been married in the *quartier treizième*, or the thirteenth district, which was an impossibility, as before the new system of arrondissements there were only twelve divisions in the city of Paris.

"What is it ?" he replied, coming to her side, taking a cigar from his mouth and bending over her shoulder.

"Hang that — *Review* fellow !" she exclaimed. "It is infernally odd, they can't let me alone."

"Is there an attack on you ?"

"I should think there was, and yet it is hardly an attack."

"What then ?"

"Some man's been writing a book about me, and this is a review of it."

She put her finger upon an article as she spoke.

"Oh ! I see," remarked the count.

"It is a great bore to have books written about one," continued Skittles.

"So it is."

"I don't half like it."

"I suppose it is the penalty one pays for being famous," observed the count with a quiet smile.

"The — always cocks a lot of latin into its articles."

"And is not always correct in its quotations."

"What does the fellow mean by *Juvenum publica cura*?"

"The recognised guardian of the young men, I presume," replied the count.

"And *lassata nondum satiata*?"

"Fatigued, but not yet used up."

"Used up, eh? he has some pretty good cheek, I must say."

"Is it a favourable review?" asked the count.

"It is not personally offensive. It praises the book awfully, but is rather more chaffy than anything else, as far as I am concerned. There is a lot in it about my eloping with a married baronet; well, suppose I did, what of it? I don't want all the world to know it."

"Of course not. Is the book an authorized biography?"

"Authorized by me?—oh! no. There are some scraps of truth in it, and a good deal of fiction: on the whole I don't think it does me justice."

"It would be impossible to do that," said the count, with a polite bow.

"I don't care what people say; nothing riles me. I once knew a man who wrote for a beastly penny paper that circulates amongst bargees and omnibus cads, and because I didn't choose to be seen with him in the Park—it wasn't likely, you know—he went home and wrote some ferocious articles, perfectly blood and thunder in their nature. He said I should die miserably, and be buried in the *fosse commune*, and a lot of rot of that description; and

all because I didn't mind chaffing him, and drinking his wine in a nighthouse, but didn't choose to be exactly Siamese with him in the Park. I didn't see it ; one must be select or up goes the donkey. Good men don't like to be seen with cads, and if a woman wants to be in a good set, why she must study that primary rule of society."

"So I should think."

"If I remember rightly there is something in one of Bulwer Lytton's novels to this effect—'A man of taste always tries to gauge a woman's character and her moral worth by finding out whom she has loved. If she has been spoony on a lawyer's clerk it is not very complimentary to a barrister if she subsequently fixes her affections on him, and if she has been *bien connue* with a non-commissioned officer, the captain of a company would not feel flattered if she chose to give him her heart, and so on ; but if, on the other hand, she has loved and been loved by a duke, and come down to a commoner simply because she really loves him, the case is altered.'"

"So it is."

It will be seen by the above remarks that Skittles, since her residence in France, had become philosophical. The phrase "moral worth" when used by Skittles was worthy of notice. She was evidently acquiring self-esteem.

"Does the Empress drive in the Bois to-day?" she exclaimed.

"Most probably."

"Then I shall go. Have the cream-coloured ponies come over from England yet?"

"They arrived last night : will you go for a drive in the country?"

"In what direction?"

"Versailles, St. Cloud."

"No, I am tired of Versailles and its rubbishing fountains, that are licked into fits by our Crystal Palace."

"What will you do then? I am at your service."

"Oh! yes, I know you are always my most devoted," she said, with a laugh.

The Count de Laraquez smiled in his habitual manner and with his habitual imbecility, and lighted a fresh cigar.

"I'll tell you what I should like to do," exclaimed Skittles.

"What's that?"

"Go to Clichy."

"Clichy!" repeated Laraquez, in a tone of surprise. "*Mais, pourquoi?*"

"There are a lot of fellows there who have been brought to grief by me, and it is only fair to go and peep at them occasionally."

"But a debtors' prison——"

"Is not such a bad place after all."

"How do you know?" he enquired.

"I have been both in Whitecross-street and the Bench."

"Indeed."

"Yes, only to see fellows, though."

"Ah! *c'est autre chose*," said Laraquez, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Have you never been to Clichy?"

"Never."

"You will go there some day. So I suppose you are not in a hurry."

"How do you mean, will go?"

"Men who have anything to do with me always smash."

"Always?"

She nodded.

"Then I must take warning in time."

"As soon as you like."

"*Pas encore*, you are too pretty; my dream is not yet over."

"It will be a rude awakening."

"It will?"

"Oh! yes; am I not candid?"

"Too much so."

The Count de Laraquez was astounded at the cool and collected effrontery of the woman before him.

"Oh, she is joking," he muttered to himself; "it is her way."

"You will take a turn in the Bois before going to Clichy?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes; anything for a quiet life."

The carriage, which was nothing more than a remarkably handsome Park phaeton, was ordered, and the cream-coloured ponies drew it round to the door.

Although the beginning of May, the weather was cold; a blast came from the east and swept over Europe, making the ladies abandon their wished-for

muslins, resume their linseys and warm clothing, whilst furs were once more in great request.

The countess, as she was called by everyone, drove the vehicle, and Laraquez was content to lean back in the *voiture*, covered with rugs and smoking innumerable cigars one after the other.

As they went through the Place Vendôme along the Faubourg St. Honoré and up the Champs Elysées, the people stared at the daring English-woman, who was becoming pretty well known in Paris.

"The" Laraquez was the name by which she was distinguished amongst a certain set. If two men were sitting at a window of the Jockey Club, and Skittles dashed by in her phaeton at a spanking pace, they would smile and say, "Oh, it's only 'The' Laraquez."

The tradesmen idolised this new Rigolboche because she was so liberal.

Jacques Latour, *épiciier*, would say to Jules Leroux, *pâtissier*, "She is a queen. Everything I show her she buys, and never once thinks of looking at the bill. She is, *par excellence*, *la reine des lorettes*. In a word, *mon ami*, she is more than a Russian ; *vive les biches anglaises !*"

To say that any one is more than a Russian is to convey a great deal, for the Russians are celebrated in Paris for their splendour, their liberality, and their vast wealth. They rival and eclipse the English.

Skittles was the rage in Paris : the men took a fancy to her. She was more famous than all the

local celebrities put together. The actresses were eclipsed, and hated her as the devil hates holy water. The gay ladies—their name is legion—thought themselves hardly treated by the appearance of this new star in the galaxy of the *demi-monde*, and they grumbled audibly, but sank their voices to a whisper when Edouard Gompertz, the tall, ferocious looking *gendarme*, passed by within ear-shot. These cocked-hatted, epauletted, sword-bearing gentlemen are much dreaded in France, for *les lorettes* are in some cases inscribed on the police-register, and the law of the land is vigorous. The system of fining, so prevalent in England, is unknown in Paris. Break the law, assault Messieurs the police, and to prison you go, “as safe as houses,” as the charming heroine of this little book would say.

Laraquez was proud of his conquest, and ruined himself with the utmost complacency. It is a characteristic of his nation to ruin themselves to gratify their fancies. Who was that celebrated duchess who sold many acres of corn-bearing land in order to buy a large mirror?—mirrors having just then come into fashion—and, when remonstrated with on her folly, said—

“Oh but, my dear, a mirror is so much nicer than corn—one cannot regret the corn, because the equivalent is so superb.”

His only male relative was an uncle who had been a red republican, a hero of '89, a soldier of the First Empire, and had risen by his own merit to the rank of Marshal of France. He was very

old and very shaky, and lived in the provinces, but nevertheless, the news of his nephew's “high jinks” reached him, and he wrote a letter full of expletives, such as *Sacré nom de Dieu*, which I take to be slightly blasphemous, and altogether out of the vocabulary of even M. Renan, that terrible leveller, that shocking anti-Christ, whose smooth and honeyed phrases do more harm to the hero of his work than the fiercest vituperation could possibly effect.

“Why,” demanded M. Hector de Laraquez, Marshal of France, commander of the Legion of Honour—that universal decoration, that—— the list of his crosses and ribands is innumerable——“why did he not open his eyes? *Sacré nom*, &c. How did he dare to prostitute his father's honoured name? *Parbleu, ventre bleu, ventre gris, et sacré nom*,” &c. He (the marshal) should certainly come to Paris and remonstrate with his unworthy nephew, K. T. L., as the Greek grammar has it.

Whereupon Madame la Comtesse “The” Laraquez said in sarcastic tones—

“Let him come; I'll teach your fire-eating old swell of an uncle a thing or two. My organ of veneration is small, and he wont impress me.”

The latest arrival in Paris of any importance was the Marquis of Rollingford, eldest son of the Duke of Highmountain, one of the most wealthy noblemen in England. “The” Laraquez had her eye upon this young lion, and wished to entrap him in her toils. She was growing tired of the Frenchman, whose purse showed symptoms of exhaustion occasionally.

Rollingford was not more than five-and-twenty. He rode in the Boulogne wood every day, and she knew him well by sight, and, in common with most men in Paris, he knew her features equally well. She fancied that on more than one occasion he had shown some inclination to make her acquaintance. She had construed his looks according to her own inclination perhaps, but such was her impression.

In the Bois she met him and gave him one of her sweetest glances—an act of flirtation which did not escape the jealous eyes of Laraquez, who thought that he was justified in remonstrating with her.

“Are you acquainted with that gentleman, Carry?” he exclaimed.

“I know him casually, as anybody else knows him in a casual way,” she replied, carelessly.

“He ought to be an old friend of yours.”

“Why?”

“Because you looked so tenderly at him.”

“Oh! that’s all d—— nonsense,” replied “The” Laraquez.

“Now don’t be violent,” said the count, who had a horror of scenes.

“My dear fellow,” said Skittles, “you don’t suppose I am going to ask you who I am to look at; I might just as well shut myself up in a nunnery. Perhaps you would like to introduce me to some catholic place of refuge, or hand me over to the Brompton Oratorians? Thank you, I’m much obliged, but I’d rather not. If I go to Heaven at all, it will be like the Irishman, ‘in a swing.’”

And she tried to whistle the air of “The Night before Larry was stretched.”

“I do not wish to put any restriction upon you, my dear child ; but——”

“Oh! shut up!” she cried ; “I hate people who jaw.”

“But——”

“Yes, you do begin to jaw, and see what will happen to you.”

“I will——”

“No, you wont. Light another weed and make yourself comfortable ; I’m going to turn round and hook it off to Clichy.”

The marquis growled but held his tongue.

There is little in Clichy that differs from other gaols for the incarceration of insolvent debtors. Gaols at all times, and in all countries, are dull places, and few people would live in them from choice. There are, however, some obstinate people who do not chose to pay the uttermost farthing, and consequently they are compelled to sojourn apart from their fellow-creatures.

The man whom “The” Laraquez ostensibly went to see was a major in the French army who had loved not wisely but too well, and his love for a reckless and extravagant woman, coupled with imprudent bets on the chances of horses, that did not run according to his expectations, led to his imprisonment.

The countess left Laraquez holding the reins, saying—

“You had better stay here ; I don’t want you—I shan’t be a minute.”

He accepted the office imposed upon him, and took it like a lamb. Her word to him was law. He spoke the truth when he said that his dream was still unbroken, for he was bound in the chains of a very potent spell.

The major met his former *chère amie* in a room set apart for the reception of visitors—with him was a friend.

“Oh! how you do?” he exclaimed, in imperfect English; “I am to see you glad. It is of you kind. My friend, permit me, introduce——”

He stopped abruptly, for Skittles burst into a loud laugh which was echoed from the other side of the room.

“Well, this is the strangest thing that ever happened,” she exclaimed; “I *am* surprised beyond measure.”

“And so am I,” replied a voice, cool, collected, even phlegmatic as becomes a foggy islander. “It is, however, one of those merciful dispensations for which Providence is notorious.”

She was face to face with Trevelyan—with the man who had first caused her footsteps to wander in those Paphian groves in which she had ever since found so much consolation—with Trevelyan the cynic, the egotist, the consummate man of the world.

CHAPTER II.

CLICHY.

"How the devil did you tumble into this hole?" inquired Skittles, with that frankness of expression so eminently characteristic of the modern Aspasia.

"The vicissitudes of noble families are not less mysterious to Sir Bernard Burke than to myself, with this exception, that Ulster King-at-arms is a theoretical philosopher, while I can speak from actual experience," replied Trevelyan.

"Now you are going beyond me. I suppose some snip has shut you up in quod?"

"I plume myself upon never having defrauded a tailor of a single halfpenny in the whole course of my life."

"Your weed man, then?"

"On the contrary, my tobacco merchant is not the value of a penny piece to the bad, at least, as far as I am concerned."

"Horses?"

"No."

"Women?"

"Ah! you know my weak point. There you hit me."

"I thought I should knock you off your perch."

"I am delighted at the idea of being upset by so skilful a shot."

"Who is this wonderful woman?"

"I only know one wonderful woman."

"And that is?"

"Yourself."

"I see you are as full of blarney as ever."

"Sows' ears do not make silk purses."

"Bad pennies always turn up, though. I never knew a duffer in my life that I didn't meet him oftener than a good sort."

"Does that imply that either mentally or physically I am inferior to the ordinary run of men who are favoured with the honour of your society."

"The worst of you is you are such a beggar to talk," said Skittles, with an impatient yawn.

"That is precisely the difference between me and the sailor's parrot."

"Why?"

"Because he was—what is it? I forget the epithet, but if my memory serves me well, it is a term of endearment amongst nautical men. Let us substitute bird—bird is harmless. He was such a bird to think. The parrot thought—I talk."

"You talk nonsense."

"Forgive me—what is life that one should talk sense? Commonplace talk is very easy to understand."

"Don't you cheek me, or——"

"What, my Skittles!—for you are my Skittles—was I not your Barnum? Did I not introduce you

to the pomps and vanities of a wicked world, and divorce you from the briny element to be met with at the 'Black Jack?' O, those ecstatic days! I always said, *Forsitan hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*"

"That's right, do be a beastly cad, and air your latin before a lady."

"It is all I have—all that a long and dissolute career ending in Clichy has left me. I am justly proud of my classical attainments."

"Do you want a slap in the eye?" exclaimed the countess.

"Nothing would delight me more," replied Trevelyan. "I have been a stranger for ten days to the blandishments and caprice of the fair sex, who are certainly in the pay of Satan, or I should not shudder at the sight of fire."

"Tell me——"

"One moment. Permit me to offer you a chair. It is made of wood, like the people's shoes, but it is the best that I can give you."

"I'd rather stand—but, I say, don't keep me here. I've got a swell outside."

"Let him wait!" replied Trevelyan, grandly.

"Oh! that wont kill him—he's used to it."

"So I should have imagined."

"Take care——"

She held up her hand warningly.

"I will not be intimidated. I have not had a row for a long time. It is exactly four-and-twenty hours since I punched a warder's head, for refusing me some bitter beer when I asked for it. I was hauled up before the governor, who is an ass, and

he fined me twenty francs, whereupon I expressed myself in plain French as to his worship's capabilities and qualification for the post he holds. He fined me another twenty francs to make me civil. I told him that he had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations."

"Why?"

"Because he had re-fined me."

"Oh, you beast! I wouldn't have listened to you all this time if I had thought you were going to make an atrocious pun," said Skittles, in a tone of deep disgust.

"What will you have?" said Trevelyan, with a smile; "our resources are limited, but we are still able to entertain our friends."

"I will have some sparkling Burgundy, if I have anything."

"So you shall. Major, will you kindly do the needful?"

The major, who had been dumb during this conversation, nodded and said—

"With much pleasure I will the wine order."

"How the time flies!" remarked Trevelyan.

"Yes; we met last at Biarritz."

"Charming *rencontre!*"

"Charming humbug!"

"If you choose to think so—but let us be friends. Don't lose your temper, and talk wildly."

"All right," she replied, laughing; "only I like to pitch into you. You are such a funny devil."

"That proves to me, my young and intelligent

friend, that your ideas of wit and humour are circumscribed."

"Bosh!"

"There was a time when, like Saul, that overgrown monarch of Israel who went ass-hunting, I took upon myself to lift up my voice and give utterance to prophetic words. I predicted your greatness."

"Yes, you always did say I should make a shine, and kick up a shindy some day," replied Skittles, with a self-satisfied smile. "But tell me about yourself—why are you here?"

"The fact is, I endure these bonds for conscience's sake."

"How do you mean?"

"I will not be choused."

"By whom?"

"A woman of designing proclivities."

"Well."

"I broke my leg out hunting a wild boar, or some preposterous beast."

"Yes."

"And I was taken to a cottage."

"What else?"

"Where I was attended with some care, and brought round by aid of splints, medical attendance, and soup *maigre*."

"More than you deserved," observed "The" Laraquez.

"Perhaps," replied Trevelyan, with his imperturbable smile. "To resume: there was a daughter."

"Oh!" exclaimed his auditress, drawing a deep breath.

"She was pretty and unsophisticated; to the amorous palate she was what an oyster without pepper, vinegar, and the other garnishes of the popular bivalve is to those addicted to the consumption of molluscs. She pleased me."

"Oh, you brute!"

"She did not think so; for she placed herself in the ranks of the foolish virgins."

"Poor creature!"

"Not at all. I offered her a hundred pounds."

"That was liberal."

"It was more—to her it was a princely gift. It would have been a small fortune to her."

"Did she refuse it?"

"Her father did."

"For what reason?"

"The old scoundrel," replied Trevelyan, "took a fancy to me, and wanted me for his son-in-law."

"What a joke!" cried Skittles, who was much interested in his narration.

"I objected, and kicked very forcibly over the traces. 'Your daughter, my worthy man,' I said, 'is all very well *pour passer le temps*, but as for anything else—it is absurd to think of it!' The fellow would not understand me. I defied him. He was obdurate, brought an action against me for breach of promise. The whole family went into the box, and perjured themselves so awfully that God will never forgive their souls, and I was condemned to pay two hundred pounds to the girl."

"I suppose you said you'd see her d—— first."

"Exactly."

"I should not wonder if you did promise the girl something."

"Certainly I did."

"What?"

"Money, but not marriage."

"I know you of old," Skittles said, with a shake of the head.

"I refused to pay," continued Trevelyan, "and they put me in here."

"Are you not getting deucedly tired of it?"

"Upon my word I am. The rogue's lawyer came to-day to say that they would accept fifty pounds, and sign a receipt in full. I refused to listen to him, but, after some consultation, I agreed to give him his costs, but not one penny to Rosine's father, who is the author of all the mischief. To the girl herself I would give anything in moderation that she liked to demand, but to harpies of parents not that much."

He snapped his fingers as he spoke.

"Did he accept your terms?"

"He said he'd consult his client, and give me an answer to-night or to-morrow morning."

"I'll bet you he takes it," said Skittles.

"Attorneys are but men with a dash of Jew in them," replied Trevelyan.

A servant entered and exclaimed—

"The count, madam, desires me to say that he is tired of waiting."

"Ask him to come inside, then."

"Our friend the major has retired," said Trevelyan.

"From the service?—yes!"

"I mean from the room."

"Ah! so he has. I forgot him. I came here to see him—came on purpose, but talking to you put him out of my head."

"Perhaps he went away to avoid possible temptation."

"Don't be a fool."

"Let him be famous henceforth as the Joseph of Clichy."

The Count de Laraquez entered, and awaited an introduction to Trevelyan.

CHAPTER III.

TREVELYAN SINGS A SONG.

"I AM so vexed to think that you should have been kept waiting out in the cold, my poor dear Auguste!" exclaimed the countess, running to him and patting him on the cheek with her hand. "How silly of you not to come to me. This is a very old friend of mine. Mr. Trevelyan, the Count Laraquez. Now you know one another. Trevelyan is the only Platonic acquaintance I ever had in my life."

A sickly smile overspread the features of the count, who said—

"I feel much pleasure in inscribing Mr. Trevelyan's name on my list of friends."

A warder entered the room and made a sign to Trevelyan, who went to meet him, and engaged in an earnest conversation for some minutes.

"Why do you come here to see men?" said the count, who was in a bad temper.

"Because I choose to."

"I don't like it."

"Cut it, then."

"You always say that."

"I mean what I say."

"More shame for you, then."

"I don't know what shame is," replied Skittles ;
"I've no d—— modesty about me. I can call a
spade a spade, and a cauliflower a——"

"I have some right to speak," exclaimed the
count, interrupting her.

"Speak as long as you like, and say whatever
you wish, but if I choose to go and see one old friend
and meet another accidentally, I shall have a chat
over old times. Where's the harm?"

"I did not say there was any harm."

"No, you know better."

"What I object to is——"

He hesitated.

"What?"

"The man."

"What man?"

"This Trevelyan."

"For what reason?"

"He cannot be good for much, or he would not
be here," replied the count.

"That shows how much you know about it."

"I draw an inference from reasonable grounds."

"Why Trevelyan is one of the first gentlemen in
Paris."

"I am incredulous."

"Say another word, and I will tell him your
opinion," she said, threateningly.

"No, no ; do not do that. What I said was
meant for you alone."

"You should be more careful in what you say

If you don't mean all the world to hear a thing, do not tell it to a woman."

"You are a magpie."

"I will be in this instance, if only to serve you out; I'll tell him what you say. Trevelyan!"

"I'll be with you in half a second."

He spoke a dozen words to the gaoler and came to Skittles' side.

"What is it, bundle of charms?" he exclaimed.

"Oh," she replied, putting up her hand, "you must not talk to me like that before my husband. or——"

"Well?"

"Guess the rest. He is like a Bengal tiger when aroused."

"I have killed tigers in the jungle," replied Trevelyan, stroking his moustache complacently.

Laraquez regarded him fiercely.

"The fact is, the count has been slanging me for knowing men shut up in Clichy."

"Really! Is he insured against probable contingencies?"

"Not he; I'll back he is here himself before long."

"If that is the count's only objection to me, I am glad to say that I am my own master. The attorney for the plaintiff in the action of Maurigy against Trevelyan has consented—thief of the world that he is—to accept my terms; consequently, I have only to write a cheque for the amount, and I am a free man."

"Hurrah!" cried Skittles; "I'm d—— glad of it."

that; we'll be as jolly as sandboys. I'll lay something you are dying to have a spree after being hole-and-cornered for so long a time."

"The time for sprees is over with me," replied Trevelyan; "I am thinking of settling down and becoming the father of a family."

"Of Maurigys?" inquired Skittles.

"Not exactly; no, thank you. One always fights shy of a biting dog. Oh, by —, no! I like the Maurigys as I do rattlesnakes—at a distance."

"Anyhow you will take your hook out of this?"

"At once."

"That is right."

"And I have much pleasure in inviting yourself and the Count Laraquez to my rooms. My box at the opera is unoccupied; we will, if you like, drop in for an hour, and return to my place in the Rue la Fitte, where I will have some provender ready for us."

"That will be charming in the extreme," cried Skittles. "I have not been drunk," she added, with a sudden burst of candour, "for a month. Let's all get jolly well drunk by way of a change: it won't hurt us."

"I am your most obedient; I'll do anything in the world to please you, except stay here. I have been a martyr long enough for conscience' sake, and I believe I should have paid the rascals in full to-morrow had they not knocked under; there is nothing like firmness to make your legal opponent cave in and knuckle down."

"I will give you a lift in my trap," said Skittles, "if you will not be long."

"Lightning shall not be quicker," replied Trevelyan, who went to a side-table, took a cheque-book from his pocket, and drew a draft for the amount he had consented to hand over to the solicitor, who was awaiting his favour in the passage outside.

"You will have to do buttons, that is, sit behind," said Skittles.

Trevelyan made a grimace, and pointed furtively at the count, as who should say, "Make him go."

"Oh, pack me away anywhere," he said, aloud.

"Very well; we will do our best for you."

A short time afterwards they were in Paris. The opera was visited, and Laraquez began to like Trevelyan very much; he frankly owned that he had at first formed an erroneous estimate of his character.

Trevelyan's apartments in the Rue la Fitte were gorgeously furnished, and the supper his servants, by his direction, prepared for his guests was luxurious in the extreme; high priced as his rooms were, the cost of that supper for three people would have paid his rent for three months if not more.

After supper, Skittles said—

"We must have a song. I declare that I will not let you alone, Trevelyan, until you sing a song."

"I am afraid that a Scotch ballad will hardly be intelligible to Laraquez."

"I have been in Scotland," replied the count "and I fancy I could understand your idioms."

"Sing some Scotch thing, if you know one ; I adore Scotch songs ; they are more funny than Irish minstrelsy, which is generally sad and plaintive."

Without any further delay Trevelyan sang, in a rich clear voice, the following song, which is a favourite ballad in the north, though not perhaps so popular or widely known as "Scots wha hae," and other kindred compositions, which appeal to the patriotism of a patriotic and high-spirited people—

"THE KEACH I' THE CREEL.

"A fair young May went up the street,
Some white fish for to buy ;
And a bonnie clerk's fa'en in love wi' her,
And he's followed her by and by—by ;
And he's followed her by and by.

" 'O where live ye, my bonnie lass,
I pray thee tell to me ;
For gin the nicht were ever sae mirk,
I wad come and visit thee.'

" 'O my father he aye locks the door,
My mither keeps the key ;
And gin ye were ever sic a wily wight,
Ye canna win in to me.'

"But the clerk he had ae true brother,
And a wily wight was he ;
And he has made a lang ladder,
With thirty steps and three.

"He has made a cleek but and a creel,
A creel but and a pin ;
And he's away to the chimley-top,
And he's letten the bonnie clerk in.

“The auld wife, being not asleep,
 Heard something that was said ;
 ‘I’ll lay my life,’ quo’ the silly auld wife,
 ‘There’s a man i’ our dochter’s bed.’

“The old man he gat owre the bed,
 To see if the thing was true ;
 But she’s ta’en the bonnie clerk in her arms,
 And covered him owre wi’ blue.

“‘O where are ye gaun now, father?’ she says,
 ‘And where are ye gaun sae late ?
 Ye’ve disturb’d me in my evening prayers,
 And O but they were sweet.’

“‘O ill betide ye, silly auld wife,
 And an ill death may ye dee ;
 She has the muckle buik in her arms,
 And she’s prayin’ for you and me.’

“The auld wife she got owre the bed,
 To see if the thing was true ;
 But what the wrack took the auld wife’s fit ?
 For into the creel she flew.

“The man that was at the chimley-top,
 Finding the creel was fu’,
 He wrappit the rape round his left shouther,
 And fast to him he drew.

“‘O help, O help, O hinny, now help !
 O help, O hinny, now !
 For him that ye aye wished me to,
 He’s carryin’ me off just now.’

“‘O if the foul thief’s gotten ye,
 I wish he may keep his haud ;
 For a’ the lee lang winter nicht
 Ye’ll never lie in your bed.’

“He’s towed her up, he’s towed her down,
He’s gi’en her a richt down fa’,
Till every rib i’ the auld wife’s side
Play’d nick-nack on the wa’

“O the blue, the bonnie, bonnie blue ;
And I wish the blue may do weel :
And every auld wife that’s sae jealous o’ her dochter,
May she get a good keach i’ the creel.”

His song was much applauded, especially by “The” Laraquez, who was fond of music, though she had a very poor idea of singing herself.

“You do not sing, I believe?” said Trevelyan.

“I never got beyond ‘Billy Barlow.’”

“It is a pity your education was neglected.”

“You know very well that I had to take my luck ; I was dragged up, not brought up,” replied Skittles.

“Nevertheless, the Liverpudleians have cause to be proud of their townswoman.”

The count did not seem to like this conversation ; it was anything but agreeable to him to hear bygones raked up which spoke of an acquaintanceship in the past. He fumed and fretted and moved uneasily on his chair. Skittles remarked his restless manner, and said to herself, “By Jove ! he is getting as jealous as a bear with a sore head ; never mind, it does the men good to be made jealous occasionally.”

“Ah !” said Trevelyan, with a sigh, “time flies, and yet it seems but yesterday that we were at the ‘Black Jack.’”

“It seems to me a precious long time.”

"We are both on the ocean of destiny; whither will the waves carry us?"

"Don't be sentimental."

"It is the fashion now to be a sentimental fatalist, at least in this city. Sentiment and fatalism is an imperial compound. Eugenie is the high priestess of——"

"Rome?" suggested "The" Laraquez, with a laugh.

"Possibly; but also of sentiment. Napoleon—Kinglake's friend—is the incarnation of fatalistic proclivity——"

"Now do hold your tongue, my dear Trevelyan," said Skittles; "when you talk like that and make use of long words of which you do not understand the meaning, I know that you are getting drunk."

"It is my privilege."

"And why?"

"Have I not a right to rejoice and be merry? I have an event to celebrate, and it is my custom to drink the health of my friends. I raise my glass to my lips, and say—'To those in Clichy!'"

"Pray omit the musical honours."

"I am not a school-boy," responded Trevelyan, with dignity; "I may at times be jocose, but I am never noisy."

"*A propos* of fashions; have you heard the last folly?"

"How should a poor devil in Clichy hear anything?"

"Ah, pardon me! It is to dress one's servants in the most expensive furs. Is it not amusing?"

I mean to have two dresses for my groom—one of ruby and one of sable, while I shall wear the smallest quantity of fur upon my own attire.”

“It will be striking.”

“Yes ; that is what I like. I want something that will ‘hit’ the people. I adore Paris, because the inhabitants are so delightfully volatile—their minds and their tastes are always changing. You never have time to get tired of anything : a fashion comes into vogue, you admire it, enjoy it, and lo ! it is at an end. One’s appetite is never surfeited, and its dinners, what can be more agreeable ! One does not sit down and gorge like a beast of prey upon the flesh of sheep and cows. The appetite is delicately tickled by substantial straws skilfully used by those who are acquainted with gastronomy.”

“My mind is retrospective to-night,” said Trevelyan, who had been drinking more wine than was good for him.

“Is that something unusual ?” said Skittles.

“It is. Generally I look forward, now I am carried back to halcyon days, when my Skittles was a thing of beauty, and I fondly dreamed of joy for ever.”

The count’s face flushed.

“Whatever your mind may be, sir,” he said, with some asperity, “I can tell you one thing.”

“Pray do, my dear count,” replied Trevelyan ; “I am always open to instruction ; I can see that you are in yourself a storehouse of the beautiful, and that pearls will fall from your lips.”

“Before a swine,” suggested Skittles.

"Why allude to the porcine race in the singular?" retorted Trevelyan.

"Because a man who gets drunk is a pig."

"If I am, as you suggest, *entre deux vins*," replied Trevelyan, "it is not my fault. I have gone in without reserve for the Paris fashions; they make boots—these Parisians—in a peculiar manner by machinery. The boots, as advertised, have 'screwed' soles, therefore it stands to reason that they must be a 'tight' fit."

Skittles was constrained to laugh.

"Sir," vociferated the count, "you are a buffoon."

"My dear count, you are another."

"You insult me, sir."

"Without intending to do so."

"Your remarks are singularly offensive."

"So are yours."

"I am a noble of France."

"As I have your word for it, I believe it."

"My blood is hot, sir."

"Take something to cool it, then."

"I will not be insulted by a—a *coquin*."

Trevelyan looked at Laraquez for a moment, then he slowly filled a glass with wine, and deliberately threw it in his face.

"You are an impertinent poltroon," he exclaimed; "and I baptize you."

The count sprang to his feet, and his eyes flashed fire.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHALLENGE.

THE wine so aptly dashed into Count Laraquez's eyes fell down in a shower. He was temporarily blinded. The fury that darted from his eyes and played around his countenance, as electricity around a highly charged cloud when the atmosphere is overcharged with the subtle fluid, was awful to behold.

"You dare to treat me like this!" he cried, hoarse with rage, and speaking in his own language. "You have the audacity to insult a Frenchman! I will exterminate you, and create a Fontenoy on a small scale."

"Poitiers, Cressy, Agincourt, Waterloo, and a hundred other well-fought fields, are a set-off against Fontenoy," said Trevelyan.

"Ha, Waterloo! that is what you throw in my teeth. *Polisson! fuyard!* It was Blucher who won the battle; but it will be revenged—oh, yes! trebly revenged, and the day is not far distant."

The count repeated the last words slowly and with emphasis, as if he believed himself a masculine Cassandra uttering prophecies which were sure of fulfilment within a given time.

"I care as little about what France may do in the future, as I do about what you may think fit to do at present. I would impress upon you, however, that there is a lady in the room, which is a fact you seem to have forgotten."

The allusion to Skittles, whom the count had up to the present time totally overlooked, had the effect of calming him somewhat.

"I am much obliged to you for the hint," he said. "I beg madame's pardon."

"Oh! don't mind me, old fellow," said Skittles, who was leisurely smoking a Russian cigarette; "I don't care a d——; fight it out and have done with it, and shake hands afterwards and make pax."

Trevelyan smiled; but the count was fuming inwardly and would not be pacified.

"It is getting late," Laraquez exclaimed, looking first at his watch, and afterwards at Skittles.

"Is it?" she replied, laconically.

"Are you almost ready to go home?"

"Almost, but not quite."

"Will you inconvenience yourself to oblige me?"

"Certainly not; I am very comfortable."

"I cannot stay here."

"That is your look out. You should not insult people in their own houses."

"I was provoked."

"So was Trevelyan."

"You have found an old friend," said Laraquez, sarcastically, "and I give you full permission to captivate him."

"I shall please myself about that ; but look here : since you have pitched into me, I think I ought to say something. If you objected so much to the old friend, why did you accept his invitation, come to his rooms, eat his supper, drink his wine, and bring me with you ? It seems to me you are altogether inconsistent. The fact is you are both of you tipsy, and can't help making fools of yourselves."

"For my part, I enter a protest against the charge of intoxication," said Trevelyan, who appeared calm and sober enough now.

"Oh, yes ! I know you of old ; I don't want to be told what you are. Your nasty sarcastic manner would ruffle the feathers of an angel, let alone an irascible Frenchman, who stands five feet nothing in his boots. What did you want to go shying the wine in the man's eye for ? Couldn't you let him alone ? It would serve you right if——"

Here followed a phrase which can only be politely interpreted by the subjoined conjunction of syllables : "If he were to suddenly, and in a violent manner, attack the antipodes of Mr. Trevelyan's head."

"He is perfectly at liberty to make the experiment," replied Trevelyan.

"I go," cried Laraquez ; "but before I go it is necessary that I should chastise this insolence."

"All right, my boy, go ahead !" remarked Trevelyan.

The count took two strides which brought him close to Trevelyan ; he raised his hand, and without

the slightest warning, struck him a severe blow in the face.

"God's death!" cried Trevelyan, springing to his feet; "this is too much."

He seized the Frenchman by the throat, bore him by the superiority of irresistible strength to the ground, and battered his head against the floor until he was insensible.

It is more than probable that he would have killed him there and then, had not Skittles interposed.

"Ha!" she exclaimed; "do you want to kill the man? Just leave him alone, or I'll break your head with the poker."

She threw her arms round Trevelyan, and held him in a close embrace, hampering his movements and impeding the action of his arms. He suddenly allowed her to conquer him, and sat down in a chair.

"What are you thinking of?" she said; "you must be a murderous beast to go and knock a man about like that."

"He should not have struck me. Anything else I could tolerate."

The wounded man was lying on his back breathing heavily. Blood flowed from a wound at the back of his head, and his appearance was ghastly and horrible.

"I don't know what the devil to do," exclaimed Skittles.

Trevelyan made no answer.

Taking a napkin from the table she tied it tightly

round the count's head ; then she bathed his face with water.

In about five minutes' time he revived, opened his eyes, looked wildly around him, and sat up ; when everything recurred to him he said, in a faint voice—

“ Help me to rise ; we must not stay here. I cannot stay with him.”

“ I will run away and leave you,” said Trevelyan to Skittles ; “ the sight of me disturbs him. The matter cannot end here, but I will not annoy him with my presence. I will send the *concierge* to you, and perhaps between you can get him into the brougham.”

Skittles nodded acquiescence in this plan, and Trevelyan left the room.

When he returned an hour afterwards he found his apartment deserted. The coast was clear, and he was alone.

It was evident to him that the affair could not end in its present stage. He expected that the count would send him a challenge in the morning, for hostile meetings in France are not as in England ridiculed and made sport of. Trevelyan was by no means satisfied with the punishment he had inflicted upon his antagonist. In fact, he was very much displeased with the whole affair, which was *bizarre* and *outré* in the extreme, and so unlike anything he was accustomed to. Besides, he had received a blow, which was an insult, according to traditional belief, only to be washed out with blood. He lighted a long Turkish pipe, and smoked for

more than an hour, during which time he ruminated over what had occurred, and tried to think of the best means of meeting the difficulty. When he retired to rest to snatch a few hours of uneasy and broken slumber, he had fully made up his mind that some friend of Laraquez's would wait upon him in the morning with a message from his principal.

But the morning came, and with it nobody from the count. This inactivity, this inertness, was astounding to Trevelyan, who could not understand it:

"Perhaps," he argued, "the man is satisfied with the blow he gave me, or else I have so seriously injured him that he is incapable of managing his affairs at present."

He rang for his valet, who was a sharp, shrewd fellow, and a native of Switzerland.

"Take off my livery," said Trevelyan, "dress yourself in mufti, and step down to the Hotel B——, and inquire after the health of the Count de Laraquez. On no account say who sent you. Let your inquiries be precise and circumstantial, for I am particularly desirous of being well informed."

"I understand, sir," replied the servant, who departed on his errand. He was absent more than half an hour. On his return his master laid down the *Moniteur*, and exclaimed—

"Well?"

"I did as you requested me, sir, and I have been credibly informed that the count passed a good night, although he complained this morning of an injury to his head. A doctor was sent for, and the

wound was strapped up. The count's carriage is ordered for two o'clock."

"He is then well enough to go about?"

"I have every reason to believe so, sir."

"That will do. You can go."

The man bowed and went away.

Trevelyan went to an *escritoire*, opened it, and wrote—

"MY DEAR ROLLINGFORD,

"I have involved myself in an unpleasant affair, which cannot be settled without an exchange of shots. I have on former occasions proved your friendship; may I once more so far trespass on your kindness as to ask you to be my friend in the present affair?

"Yours very sincerely,

"MONTGOMERY TREVELYAN."

This letter he dispatched to the Marquis of Rollingford, with whom he was acquainted. A short time afterwards, Rollingford's phaeton drew up in the Rue la Fitte, at the house in which Trevelyan lodged. After the usual greeting had been exchanged between them, Rollingford said—

"I was not aware that you were still in Paris. You must admit that you are something like a comet, and move in an eccentric orbit. You are here to-day, at Rome to-morrow, and at Naples the day after—to say nothing of your occasional flights to Bagdad, Herat, Jerusalem, and other outlandish places."

"I have wept by the waters of Babylon," replied Trevelyan, with a smile, "and I have smoked a pipe, and drank Bass's pale ale on the top of the great pyramid which is attributed to Cheops; but those innocent pastimes are very far from my thoughts just at present. Do you know Laraquez?"

"The man who is keeping Skittles?"

"The same."

"Oh, yes! I know him well enough—that is to say, I have met him. We do not speak, but I have seen him at the Jockey Club and different places. He has been a celebrity since he met the 'frail blasphemer.'"

"That is something new; 'frail blasphemer,' I admire that; it is an effort of genius. Well, it was through her that I very grossly insulted Laraquez last night."

"What did you do?"

"I threw a glass of wine in his face."

"Is that all?"

"No."

"I am sorry for that; I hoped that the affair might be arranged."

"Any arrangement is impossible."

"He has sent you a message, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, I have not heard from him."

"You surprise me."

"Wait a bit. After receiving the glass of wine in his face, he approached me and struck me with his clenched fist."

"Ha! the matter becomes serious."

"Yes; does it not?"

"Very much so, *mon ami*."

"It was more than I could stand; I sprang upon him, tore him to the ground, and should have killed him had not Skittles interfered."

"It is a romance," said the marquis.

"I have an opinion that it will end in a tragedy."

"There is a shadow of blood on the horizon."

"I wish you," continued Trevelyan, "to go to him and say that I demand satisfaction at his hands. May I rely on your good offices?"

"Oh, yes! I would rather you had steered clear of this little quicksand, but as the thing has happened, why it cannot be shirked."

"It cannot."

"Laraquez is staying at the B——, I think?"

"He is."

"I will drive over there at once and arrange the preliminaries."

"Many thanks; I wish you every success."

"I take your good wishes with me."

When by himself, Trevelyan muttered—

"I must kill him, because he struck me—he is the witness of my disgrace and he must die. I do not care for the woman—women are nobodies in these matters; but there must certainly be mourning in the house of the Laraquez."

CHAPTER V.

CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES.

THE Marquis of Rollingford found the count absent from home ; the servants said that he had gone out. Having many engagements, the marquis thought that his wisest course would be to leave a letter for Laraquez, stating the case in brief, and requesting the favour of an appointment, as he very much wished to have an interview with him. He did so, left it at the hotel, and went back to Trevelyan.

The count and Skittles in the meantime were taking an airing in the eternal Bois. Laraquez had not been so much hurt as he had imagined ; Trevelyan stunned without injuring him. A little rest, a few pieces of plaster, so far recovered him that he was able to put on a softly-padded hat and accompany Skittles in her afternoon excursion.

"What on earth made you strike Trevelyan?" exclaimed Skittles ; "you ought to have had more sense."

"I could not help it ; he insulted me."

"Well, you may take your oath you will hear from him."

"I do not think so."

"I am sure of it."

"People don't fight duels now."

"Don't they? What a pity. Who was that newspaper fellow and that duke? I have such a wretched memory for names."

"Those were exceptional instances."

"Yours will be another 'exceptional instance.'"

At five o'clock they drove home to dinner, as they were going to the theatre to see "Fanfan la Tulippe."

When they came to the dining-room the first thing that arrested the count's attention was Rolingford's letter, which lay upon the table on a silver salver. He snatched it up, read it, turned pale, and handed it to Skittles.

"What the devil's the row with you now?" she cried; "you tremble like a leaf."

"Read that letter."

She did so.

"What did I tell you?" she exclaimed; "you shouldn't insult people; Englishmen don't understand that game. You'll have to fight him, and as likely as not he'll pot you; I wouldn't lay long odds he didn't."

"He will not do that."

"How do you know?"

"I am sure of it."

"Why?"

"Because I shall not fight him."

"Not fight?" cried Skittles, raising her eyes in the utmost astonishment. "And why not, pray?"

"It is opposed to my religious principles."

"Religious tomfools! If you live in the world, and are not an ascetic and live in a monastery, why you must take your chance and do as others do."

"Nevertheless, I cannot fight."

"You could punch about with your fists fast enough."

"That is another thing."

"I don't see it."

"There was no danger in a hand-to-hand set-to."

"Wasn't there? You would have been a gone 'coon if I hadn't stepped in to save you."

"Suppose——"

"I don't want to suppose anything."

"Listen to me, my dear; just give me your attention for half-a-minute, *ma mie*."

"All right; only I hate you when you begin to jaw; besides, I'm peckish, and want my dinner," said Skittles.

"What would happen if I killed him?"

"Are you a good shot?"

"Nothing wonderful."

"I thought not."

"Allow for the sake of argument that I did kill him."

"What's the use of allowing impossibilities?"

"Take it for granted."

"Very well; what then?"

"I should be a murderer."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't; you would have killed him in a fair stand-up fight—that isn't murder."

"The law says it is."

"The French law?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, I don't know anything about law; what's the good of bothering me about things I don't understand?"

"*Rien de tout.* But this is more to the purpose—what would become of me?"

"You would have to bolt, I suppose."

"Where to?"

"Where you could."

"But the police?"

"Oh, — the police! Do what you can; I don't care; I want my dinner."

"I shall write and decline the meeting."

"You will not."

"Eh?"

"If you do not fight Trevelyan, I will cut you to-night, and all Paris will cut you to-morrow."

"Are you serious?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

"But my scruples."

"Hang your scruples!"

"What will Father Lagrange say?"

"Pay for absolution, and you'll get it all right."

"The guillotine——"

"Wasn't made for you: if they want to cut off the head of a noble, they can easily find a mushroom lord. Swells of high degree like you are not easily found—'89 weeded them off pretty well; Napoleon likes such buttresses. You will get into the Senate when I have had my pull out of you and you settle down."

"Not if I fight Trevelyan."

"You must fight him."

"I cannot."

"If you don't, you will be sorry for it afterwards."

"That may be."

"Come, dinner is waiting; we shall have lots of time for talking afterwards."

The dinner was a slightly dull affair. Laraquez did not speak, except in monosyllables; Skittles wrapped herself in a shroud of silence. She was determined that he should fight. It seemed to her perfectly monstrous that a man should refuse to fight a duel simply because he objected on conscientious grounds; she could not understand his scruples. When the repast was over, the happy couple were drinking some very good claret; all at once a knock was heard.

"*Entrez,*" said the count.

The door opened, and an old gentleman of military appearance entered.

In a voice a little above a whisper Laraquez muttered—

"*Mon oncle.*"

"Oh, your uncle is it?" exclaimed Skittles; "all right, don't be alarmed; I'll make him perfectly at home."

"Auguste," exclaimed Marshal Laraquez, "who is this woman?"

"This woman happens to be a lady," said Skittles; "and as this is her apartment, you will very quickly have to hook it, if you are not decently civil."

"Madame, my question was addressed to my nephew."

"Oh ! I didn't know you were so well connected."

"I am Marshal Laraquez."

"Are you really ?"

"And I have travelled all the way from Rouen to endeavour to get him away from a worthless woman upon whom he has set his affections."

"Very praiseworthy."

"And now, madame, may I take the liberty of inquiring who you are ?"

"I am the Countess Laraquez, *pro tem.*," replied Skittles.

"Ah !" said the marshal, drawing a long breath.

"Don't you like it ?"

Another prolonged respiration.

"Are you not well ?"

"You did right, madame, to make use of the abbreviated latin."

"So I thought, or I shouldn't have done it ; wont you sit down for a few minutes ? We are going to the theatre presently."

The old gentleman took a chair near "The" Laraquez, and said—

"Madame, I have an appeal to make to you : I am old and——"

"Silly," suggested Skittles.

"Not yet. Thank Heaven I preserve my faculties ; but it pains me beyond expression to see that poor young man led astray."

"Oho ! Lambert !" exclaimed Skittles, with a ludicrous expression of countenance.

"You meet my temperate remarks with a ribald cry."

"Oh, shut up. If you like to stay and have some wine and be jolly, you can ; if not, I shall send for the waiters and have you removed."

"Removed—have me removed ! Do you know, madame, what you are talking about ?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly. Drop it or—slope."

"This is a thunderclap ! I—'pon my word, madame, you have deprived me of the power of speech."

"That's all right. If you were only deaf and blind, as well as dumb, I might do something in the way of getting you into an asylum."

"Let him alone," said the count, who was concerned at the old gentleman's evident distress.

"Mind your own business."

"It is my bus——"

"No, it isn't : think of the pistol shooting to-morrow before breakfast, that's *your* business."

The count was silent after this home-thrust.

Turning to the marshal, Skittles said—

"Well, my dear marshal, what do you think of your nephew ? Is he not improved ?"

"He is in good hands," replied the marshal, with covert sarcasm.

"After that pretty compliment, though its application is dubious, I have a good mind to leave off teasing you."

"You have a right to please yourself in your own apartments."

"Come, that is better ; old *ursa major* is softening down at last," exclaimed Skittles.

"The state of things I behold, madame, crushes me down and breaks my heart."

"I can assure you that I regret to hear you say so. You will be a loss to a grateful country. Have you been under fire?"

"Have I? let Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram, Marengo speak for me ; let——"

He paused abruptly, for his listener was laughing immoderately at him.

"Your nephew is as fond of powder as yourself."

"He has the same blood, madame."

"He is coming out under my tuition : to-morrow he fights a duel."

"A what!—a duel, a combat of two? No, madame: it is your pleasantry. You are joking with me."

"It is the truth, as you will know if you stay in the city for twelve hours, as all Paris will be ringing with it to-morrow morning."

"Who is his adversary?"

"An Englishman."

"And the quarrel?"

"A drunken row."

"Is all this true, Auguste? Do you fight? What of your religious education—your principles?"

"I have received a challenge, but I shall not fight," replied Laraquez.

"If you do not, we separate," Skittles said in a determined tone ; "I will not live with a coward."

"He is quite right," said Marshal Laraquez ;

"I have ever been opposed to duelling. I have killed men in the open field because that was war, and war was my trade ; but never in a duel. It is against the law of God and man. He is no coward, madame, who declines to fight a duel."

"He may please himself," returned Skittles ; "I am going to the theatre. If the count means to fight, I shall be glad to see him ; if he is determined not to do so, he had better keep away."

Having said this she left the room.

The uncle and the nephew were alone together.

CHAPTER VI.

A POINT OF HONOUR.

"AUGUSTE!" said the old marshal.

"Weil?"

"You will come home with me."

"To Rouen?"

"Yes."

"No, I cannot do that. I must go to the opera to-night; besides I have business to attend to in Paris."

"Sever this connexion, cut the thread, break the connecting link."

"I have no disposition to do so."

"The woman makes a plaything of you. See how imperative she is with you. Are you a man, and can you endure it? Burst your silken fetters; no man should be a woman's slave."

"Perhaps the bondage is pleasant."

"Sin is always delightful."

"I will meet you here at twelve o'clock. That is all I can say at present," returned the young count.

"Ah, I wish your father were alive!" said the marshal, with a shake of the head. "He was a fine fellow. You have been emancipated too early."

Laraquez was in a most unpleasant dilemma : he would not fight a duel, and he knew that Skittles would leave him in consequence ; all Paris would point the finger of scorn at him, yet he was sufficiently obdurate to be a martyr to his opinions or rather to his principles. People would say he was a coward, that he feared to meet Trevelyan, and that the idea of a pistol had made him leave Paris. His disappearance with or without his uncle, on the eve of a hostile encounter, would create something worse than wonderment. Both Trevelyan and the Marquis of Rollingford were well known in Paris, and moved in the best circles. The doors of the gilded *salons* of St. Germain would be closed against him, and for a day or two he would be as much talked about as the missing husband of Madame Lambert.

Leaving his uncle, he hired a *voiture de remise*, and went to the theatre. Skittles was there, but not alone. On her way she had called for a friend, who was a charming Frenchwoman, called Madame Valentine St. Roche. Madame Valentine was fair, pretty, and fragile—just the sort of delicate butterfly-creature that any man would fall in love with, and make a toy and a plaything of as long as the charm lasted, which, generally speaking, was not a very lengthy period. There was nothing striking about her except her beauty ; she had no mind, she was not clever.

She was simply an overgrown baby.

But so darling, so lovely, so fascinating, so engaging, that any man might have been excused for

sacrificing everything for her ; and, as a rule, when men did fall in love with Valentine, they did it in a most thorough and complete manner. They idolized her, ran after her, and made her a goddess, before whom to bow the knee, and at whose shrine to worship. She was well off. Men who had known her, kept her, and cut her, had given her large sums of money, or bought her government annuities, and so numerous had been her admirers, that these sums of money amounted to a very large income. She was acquainted with the best men in Paris, or Skittles would not have honoured her with her friendship.

The count stood with his back to the wall of the box, and after speaking to Valentine, bent down, and said to Skittles—

“Were you in earnest when you said that our connexion must end if I did not fight this Englishman ?”

“I should think I was too,” replied Skittles ; “if you do not meet him, you and I separate, that’s all.”

“What have I done ?”

“Nothing ; but you have something to do, and you had better do it. Go and meet him ; don’t kill him, because he is a friend of mine. Just send a bullet through the fleshy part of his arm, or break his leg if you feel vindictive.”

“I cannot,” murmured the count.

“Are you afraid of him ?”

“I fear no one.”

“If you want me to believe that you must meet Trevelyan.”

"No."

"Then you and I break partnership."

"Do not say that."

"If you dread the event, you know how to avoid it."

"Put my affection to any other test."

"I can't, at present."

"Then I must leave you."

"*You leave me!*—that's putting the boot on the wrong leg. *I cut you, my boy.*"

He sat down beside her in the corner of the box, where he was sheltered from observation, except from the stage, and tears forced themselves from his eyes. "The" Laraquez noticed the lachrymose demonstration, and said—

"Stop that snivelling; I want to see what 'Fanfan' and 'Madame de Pompadour' are about to do—the play is rather interesting."

Laraquez sobbed.

"Come, I say, stop that! You were born in the month of cucumbers, were you not? You are so watery about the head."

He collected himself by a violent effort, and grasping her by the hand, said—

"Adieu!—for ever."

"All right, that wont break my heart."

The count did not overhear the remark, for he rushed from the box like one possessed.

CHAPTER VII.

VALENTINE ST. ROCHE.

ONE thing was clear, and that was that, whether from cowardice or not, the Count Laraquez would not fight Trevelyan. Skittles felt certain of that, and she was in a dilemma, and knew not how to act. Valentine St. Roche invited her to her house to take supper.

"You must come," said Valentine, in that charming tongue which never sounded sweeter or prettier than when issuing from her ruby lips.

"You will have a lot of fellows there?"

"Oh! not one."

"Positively?"

"Yes."

"That's remarkable."

"It is one of the wonders of the world," said Valentine, with a laugh.

"What world?"

"The world—great, big world, *la monde*."

"The *demi-monde* you mean," said Skittles, for once in the course of her existence making a very bad pun.

"Ha! ha! you are so *clevare*."

It was a little remarkable that Valentine was going to sup alone, for her *petits soupers* were very *recherché*, and the envy of Paris. Men would give almost anything for an invitation to one of Valentine St. Roche's parties. There they were sure to meet the best set in Paris, men belonging to the very best clubs—such as the Circle Impérial, the Chemin de Fer, the Union, and the Jockey.

"You will come?"

"Oh, yes! with pleasure."

"Ah! how charming!—we will have one quiet evening, and enjoy ourselves, oh, too much."

Skittles laughed, and they went to the Avenue de l'Impératrice, in which fashionable locality the St. Roche resided.

"You prefer being near the Bois to living in the Brèda quarter?" said Skittles.

"Brèda!" echoed St. Roche, in great disgust; it is a place for the *canaille*, nothing more."

"St. Germain is preferable."

"*Oui*; but it is the abode, of what you say, old fogies. It is out of date."

"Something like our Bloomsbury, I suppose."

"What is that?"

"A quarter in London."

"Ah! I must to London go, some one fine day."

"I want your advice," said Skittles, when they were in Valentine's bed-room. "The fact is——"

"Drink some of this *absinthe*; it will give you an appetite," said Valentine, interrupting her. "Afterwards we will talk over the business."

When she had taken some *absinthe* and water, she said—

“Now, then, what you want to say?”

“Laraquez has been challenged.”

“Oh, *mon Dieu* ! a duel !”

“Yes.”

“When does he fight?”

“That is just what I can’t tell you.”

“How?”

“He refuses to fight.”

“Not fight? Oh, *polisson* !”

“He says he isn’t afraid.”

“Why not fight, then?”

“Because it is against his principles.”

“Ha, I see, he is religious—is that it?”

“That is about the size of it, I expect.”

“He will be disgraced.”

“Of course.”

“Now, I don’t care about the man,” said Skittles; “but I don’t want to have it said that I lived with a man who was such an infernal coward that he wouldn’t fight when he was called out. I am by way of being courageous myself, and I hate a man who has no pluck.”

“I should think so ; so should I.”

“What would you do?”

“I will tell you,” said Valentine, with an air of superior sagacity.

“What?”

“Fight him yourself.”

“I—me fight?”

“Yes; why not?”

"He might kill me; besides, he would know that I am a woman."

"Dress up."

"I might do that, certainly."

"It will be better than letting people think you live with a coward. The protection of a coward, what is it?"

"Not much, certainly; but do you really think it would be possible to go on the ground to-morrow morning and fight for Laraquez?"

"I think so; perhaps you will not be hit. Who is the man you are going to fight—do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, I know him well; he is a very nice fellow, and I should be sorry to pot him. I think I shall fire in the air."

"Oh! I have an idea," suddenly said Valentine.

"What is it?"

"Can't you get a chain shirt? They say that chain armour will prevent a bullet from penetrating and hurting one."

"Capital. I will order one at once, and wear a slouched hat and a thick over-all sort of cloak, so that no one will ever guess anything. Will you come with me and act as my second?"

"I shall be proud to do so."

"You can talk French, you know, and I am not much of a hand at it. I wish I was as accomplished as you are. How did you manage to learn English and speak it so well as you do?"

"I was lady's-maid once to an English lady, and I have lived with Englishmen."

“Oh! that accounts for it.”

Skittles wrote a note to Trevelyan, imitating Laraquez's narrow, cramped handwriting as well as she could, stating that the Count de Laraquez would be at a certain spot in the Boulogne Wood at an early hour in the morning, and fully prepared to give him every satisfaction he felt himself justified in asking for.

This was taken to the Rue la Fitte by one of Valentine St. Roche's servants, and another was despatched to a famous costumier's for all the articles of masculine wearing apparel, together with a brace of pistols, which would be required in the morning.

Soon afterwards she retired to rest, Valentine having kindly offered her a bed. Feeling restless and uncomfortable, she could not sleep. She walked up and down the room, and at last leant against an antique piece of furniture, intended for a wardrobe. As she did so a drawer flew open. It was evidently a secret one, and she had touched a hidden spring. A MS. was revealed to her view. It was neatly written, and having nothing better to do she took it up and perused it. The manuscript was a simple tale, entitled—

“LETTY'S TRIUMPH.

“MISS LETITIA HARLOWE was the daughter of a gentleman who had during his lifetime held an important situation under Government. This vague phrase implies a great deal. Mr Harlowe might have been a consul-general at Aleppo or Valladolid; he

might have been an officer in the Customs or a Liverpool tide-waiter, a War-office clerk or a Treasury lounge; but as it happened he was neither one nor the other. He had held a position of trust in the Blue-bag-Red-tape-and-Stick-of-Sealingwax Office, which has its local habitation in Downing-street—that home of statesmanship and politics.

“In the Blue-bag &c. &c. office Mr. Harlowe had managed his pecuniary affairs with such consummate ability as to be able to leave at his death ten thousand pounds to each of his daughters, Letitia and Florence; and Government, in gratitude for its clerk’s long and distinguished services, allowed his widow a handsome annuity for the term of her natural life.

“The Harlowes lived at Kensington. There are many quiet, retired, elegantly-built villas near Camden-park, and in one of those, which as well as being elegant had the superlative merit of being cheap, the small family resided.

“Mrs. Harlowe was an amiable lady, not very highly accomplished, but possessing many good and sterling qualities. She had not been educated in the days of high-pressure school, when girls are put into seminaries very much as plants are put into hot-houses, in order to make a certain amount of progress in a given time: as the floral growth is forced, so is the mental.

“She kept two servants, and a page, who rejoiced in buttons polished to a dazzling lustre which made the eyes blink. The Harlowes did not keep a carriage, they couldn’t afford that; but they were

in the habit of hiring an anonymous brougham on high-days and holidays when a floral fête was going on at either of the rival flower-gardens, when it was incumbent upon them to go to the opera, or pay a visit to Mr. Mudie's library to obtain a new set of books, or, in a word, to do anything else that other people in the fashionable world were in the habit of doing.

"Florence Harlowe was at school in Paris; but being a young lady of a volatile disposition and overflowing spirits, she at seventeen found the confinement of a '*pension*' irksome, and longed for the comparative freedom of home, which her mother had promised her she should enjoy at the ensuing Christmas-time, when she should bid a final adieu to her French friends, and luxuriate in the narrow dimensions of the Kensington villa.

"Unlike her sister Letitia, who was four years older than herself, Florence was very pretty. She was one of those round-faced, flaxen-haired girls, happily so often to be met with in England. There was none of that tragic and commanding beauty about her which is associated with heroic verse and historic opera. She was simply pretty, innocent, unassuming, and vivacious.

"Letitia, on the other hand, was very plain—painfully plain; but she had the good sense to know it and admit it. The result of her sensible conduct was that she fortified her mind, and did all she could to fascinate those with whom she came in contact by the brilliancy of her conversation, the wide range of her information, and her imperturbable good humour.

“In spite of her plainness, Letitia Harlowe had a lover in the person of a young surgeon living in the neighbourhood. The gentleman’s practice was said, by those who pretended to be acquainted with his affairs, to be small—so lamentably small indeed as hardly to bring him in the daily bread, to say nothing of cheese, which is necessary to keep body and soul together. This fact did not imply any want of merit on his part. On the contrary, it might have been his misfortune rather than his fault.

“Reginald Carleton lived with his father, who had a small semi-detached house in a retired street which was principally celebrated for the quantity of lime-trees on each side of it. A brass plate let into the door informed invalids and the public generally that Mr. R. Carleton, surgeon, resided there; and another brass plate invited them to knock and ring, as if it were penal to perform one action without the other, and injurious to the young man’s practice to knock at the door without at the same time pulling the bell.

“The bell was of the dual order—that is to say, there were two bells, one of which had the ominous word ‘night’ inscribed upon it. The clapper of this bell was placed in Mr. Reginald Carleton’s bed-room, and it was the darling delight and extreme pleasure of Reginald’s friends and acquaintances, when returning home from a party, to go out of their way, even to the extent of half a mile, in order to pull this bell, and give the aspirant for medical honours the fallacious idea that his valuable services were instantly required at the bedside of some unhappy sufferer.

"He at last became shy and wary, like the once-trapped bird, and never on any account descended the stairs till he had opened his window and held a parley with the messenger (if any) standing in the cold below.

"Mrs. Harlowe being a woman of the world, and having some knowledge of men and the perfidiousness of the masculine character, had her doubts about the authenticity and reality of Mr. Carleton's passion for her daughter. He had not been resident long in the neighbourhood, and had met Letitia at a carpet dance at the house of a mutual friend. The fact of Letty's having ten thousand pounds was pretty generally known, and her mother fancied that Mr. Carleton might have more love for so handsome a sum than for her plain daughter.

"One morning, about three weeks before Christmas, when the air was cold and chilly after a severe frost, Mrs. Harlowe was reading the paper, and Letty was standing with one foot upon the fender, looking at herself in the glass. Suddenly she exclaimed—'I *am* plain, mamma; it's useless to deny it. I don't believe there is a single good feature in my face. Why is Flory so much better looking than me?'

"Her manner was both petulant and impatient; and although Mrs. Harlowe was prepared to make ample allowance for an unconsidered burst of chagrin, ill-temper, or excusable disappointment, she did not think that she should be doing her duty if she allowed the remark to pass without comment or condemnation.

“‘You certainly are not, strictly speaking, beautiful,’ she replied, laying down her newspaper, and looking steadily at Letty; ‘but at the same time you are far from being positively ugly. I think it is wrong—very wrong of you to repine at your lot. If you are not as lovely as Florence, you have nevertheless your mission to fulfil. We were all sent into the world for some wise purpose. If you have not facial graces you have those of the mind. You must remember that many of the greatest women, whose names are remembered at this day, were not celebrated for the symmetry of their forms or the regularity of outline which characterized their features. Girls like yourself have more influence over men than those who are more striking. You have strength and will. You have determination and fixity of purpose. You have much to be thankful for; and I beg of you never to let me hear you talk as you did just now.’

“‘I am very sorry for saying anything of which you disapprove,’ said Letty; ‘but when I looked at myself in the glass I felt inclined to break every mirror in the house. Flory is coming home at Christmas, and do you know what I thought, mamma?’

“Mrs. Harlowe looked inquiringly at her daughter, and said, ‘No.’

“‘I thought that she would eclipse me and cut me out. That when we went to balls and parties every one would look at Flory and no one at me. I shall be very useful to Flory, for I shall set her off. Men will say, There are the Harlowe girls,

there is not much doubt about which is the prettiest of the two; and—and I should like to be a nun and not go anywhere.'

"This was said with such a lugubrious air that Mrs. Harlowe smiled, and exclaimed—

" 'The fact is, Letty, you are like a great many diffident young people, you do not think enough of yourself. You will never do great things if you disparage yourself as you are doing at present.'

" 'I will try and be bolder—but, mamma.'

" 'Yes, my dear.'

" 'I want to ask you one thing. Do you think Mr. Carleton really cares for me?'

" 'What do you think yourself?'

" 'No, no! that is not an answer to my question. What is your opinion?'

" 'Surely you are the best judge in a matter of that sort. Has he told you that he loves you?'

" 'Oh, yes! on more than one occasion he has given me to understand that he is very much attached to me, and that I am—I don't know how dear to him!' replied Letty, her eyes sparkling at the reminiscence.

" 'You look interesting now, Letty,' said her mother. 'You are wrong to condemn yourself. When your face is lit up with expression you are decidedly interesting. You have small hands and feet, with a well-turned ankle, your figure is good, your ears are pretty, and your hair is a rich glossy dark brown.'

" 'Do men look at those things, mamma?' asked

Letty, innocently. 'I thought they only studied faces.'

" 'Ah, you have a great deal to learn yet!' replied Mrs. Harlowe, laughing. 'Well, let us return to our sheep. We were talking of Mr. Carleton. I am not going to be his apologist, for frankly I must tell you he is a young man whom I do not like. I don't wish to pry into your secrets, Letty, any more than an affectionate mother has a right to, but I should like to know whether you reciprocate the young man's attachment.'

" 'I do, mamma, and yet I do not,' replied Letty, hesitatingly.

" 'I am at a loss to understand that slightly enigmatical reply.'

" 'Well, I will try and be more explicit. Sometimes I fancy I love him very much—as much as, or more than he says he loves me, but all at once a change comes over the spirit of my dream. There seems to be a want of sympathy between us. I am no longer attracted to him, and I become cold, and listen to his protestations with indifference. It seems as if some bad but fascinating angel were talking to me, when my good angel steps in and dispels the illusion.'

" 'You have expressed yourself with poetical feeling, Letty,' Mrs. Harlowe remarked, 'but every word you have uttered is pregnant with common sense. I have also experienced the repulsion you speak of when in Mr. Carleton's society, and yet it would be difficult to say on what ground I am thus elled. I hope every time the feeling comes over

me that I am not doing the young man any injustice.'

" 'Can he have heard of my being an heiress?'

" 'It is more than probable.'

" 'You think so?'

" 'Every one knows it. Your father's will is visible at Doctors' Commons for a shilling, and any fortune-hunter can go there and see it for that small sum. There is no doubt that Mr. Carleton knows you to be tolerably well off. I do not say that he pretends to like you on that account, but it is extremely probable.'

" 'You would advise me to be on my guard, mamma, and not give myself up entirely to him?' inquired Letty, with a tremulous motion at her heart.

" 'Most certainly I would.'

" After this declaration, Letty remained absorbed in thought, playing in an absent manner with a locket which hung round her neck.

" 'Are you not going to practise this morning?' asked her mother.

" 'Oh, yes! I have not yet tried the new music from *Faust* you bought me,' Letty replied, springing up, and sitting down at the piano, soon afterwards dashing gaily into the midst of an inspiring melody.

" FATHER AND SON.

" THE Carletons were very poor. Mr. Carleton had spent a large sum of money over his son's education, thinking that in qualifying him for the

business of a surgeon, he was making a provision for himself in his old age ; but in this belief he was mistaken.

“The young man might have acquired a tolerable amount of practice had he laid himself out for it, but this he would not do—he obstinately refused to exert himself in any way.

“It frequently happened that people called upon Reginald Carleton, to visit him professionally, and found him out. It was a singular fact that he was seldom, if ever, at home when he was wanted. His father’s remonstrances were thrown away upon him, and so was his dearly-bought diploma, which might as well never have been won for the amount of use it was to him.

“And where did he spend his time ?

“In the alehouse and the billiard-room, or sitting on a chair in a tobacconist’s shop—the oracle of the place, giving his opinion about foreign affairs, the theatres, and the last new novel, with a consummate effrontery for so superficially instructed a man as himself. He was passionately fond of pool, and would stay out half the night with his dissolute companions, making the evening hideous with his angry exclamations whenever luck happened to be against him, and he had lost more “*lives*” than he could afford to pay.

“This idleness and indifference to business were the ruin of his father and of himself. The poor old gentleman, who was a retired naval officer on half-pay, struggled hard against misfortune, but there was little that he could do. His sons vicious

courses weighed him down, and were hurrying him to an early grave.

"And this was the man who thought he could marry Letty Harlowe. This was the eligible *parti* upon which he fondly supposed she was a'out to throw away herself, and her ten thousand pounds.

"Mr. Carleton kept only one servant, and she, poor thing, had so much to do one day and another during the day, that she was glad to get to bed at ten o'clock, or a little after; so the old gentleman was compelled very frequently to sit up for his son and let him in, for a latch-key was one of those abominations he would not tolerate.

"Reginald had had several keys made, all of which his father discovered and secretly abstracted, quickly making away with them, much to Reginald's disgust; but as he was unable to help himself, he was obliged to put up with the loss, and order another, which soon followed the fate of its predecessors.

"It so chanced that just about the time that Mrs. and Miss Harlowe were discussing himself and character, he was reeling home from a debauch. He had gone to an evening party at the house of a friend, who was a bachelor and passionately fond of cards; limited loo was introduced at ten o'clock, and the party of gamblers did not break up until ten the next morning. They had been playing twelve hours at a stretch, and it was not to be wondered at that Reginald Carleton was a little unsteady in his gait, dirty as to his beard, face, and shirt-collar, flushed about the cheeks, and inflamed as to his eyes.

"When he reached his father's door, he met a man with a decidedly Jewish cast of countenance coming out. He scrutinized him critically, and wondered what had brought him to the paternal residence.

"The son of Israel returned his rude and impudent stare with a glance of pity, mingled with disgust, and hurried on ; for he had much business to transact, and he might not linger on his way.

"As he had reeled along the street, the cynosure for neighbours' eyes, so he reeled into the breakfast-room, and throwing himself into a chair with an air of drunken *abandon*, said—

"‘For heaven’s sake give me a cup of tea ! I feel so hipped and shaky.’

"It was easy to see that what little sleep the old sea-captain had enjoyed had been snatched in an arm-chair.

"‘Where have you been all night, Reginald?’ he asked.

"‘With some friends of mine. Jolly dogs all of them—capital fellows. Good glass of wine, sir, as ever I wish to taste, and spirits above proof.’

"‘What have you done with the money you had in your pocket?—that ten-pound note Mr. Freebody sent you for a quarter’s attendance? Can you let me have half of it towards the expenses of the house?’

"‘Spent it all, sorry to say. Fact was I had a run of bad luck, and got cleaned out,’ replied Reginald.

"‘Every halfpenny?’

“‘Haven’t got a penny-piece left,’ returned the young surgeon.

“‘That is very unfortunate,’ said his father; ‘I am sure I don’t know what we shall do, I do not, upon my soul; I am at my wits’ end.’

“‘Borrow some money,’ suggested Reginald.

“‘I cannot.’

“‘How is that? By the way, who was the Israelitish party I met as I came in?’

“‘Did you not recognise him? That was young Solomons the Jew; he called to demand payment of the bond you and I entered into for a hundred pounds three months ago. While he was here I thought I would take advantage of the opportunity and ask him to advance something on my pension.’

“‘Did he refuse?’

“‘He did.’

“‘For what reason?’

“‘He reminded me that I had already mortgaged it four years in advance, and that I might not live beyond that time. I do not think I shall either, Reginald, if you continue in the course you are at present pursuing. I give you my word I shall sink under it. You will bring me, in the words of the patriarch, with sorrow to the grave.’

“For a short time Reginald Carleton seemed abashed. He cast his eyes upon the carpet, and was apparently very much ashamed of himself.

“‘How did you get that knock on the eye?’ inquired Mr. Carleton, pointing to a slight abrasion of the skin over the right eye.

“‘That? Oh I was rather too affectionate to a

lamp-post on my way home, and ran up against it with the intention of embracing it,' replied his son, who immediately after added, in a cheerful and inspiring voice—

“‘It's of no use grizzling over spilt milk ; we are in difficulties, but I know a way out of them.’

“‘You do ?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘I should like you to enlighten me ; but I beg of you not to favour me with any of your drunken jokes, or what you call sells, as I am so nervous this morning, I cannot bear it,’ said Mr. Carleton, whose voice trembled as he spoke.

“‘Don't be alarmed ; I am in earnest, and shall not shock your sensibilities in any way. You have heard me speak of a young lady who lives near here ?’

“‘Miss Harlowe ?’

“‘That's the one,’ replied Reginald. ‘Well, I could marry her to-morrow if I felt inclined, but she is so very plain—so ugly, I might almost say—that I have hitherto held back : the girl is passionately fond of me. I fancy she is flattered, poor thing, at the idea of anyone taking notice of her ; at all events, I know I have only to ask, and to have to pop the question, and be accepted, *sur le champ*.’

“‘They say she has money.’

“‘Ten thousand, sir, is the exact figure,’ said Reginald, looking triumphantly at his father.

“‘Settled on herself ?’

“‘Goes to her absolutely ; and I will take care

that if *I* marry her, she shall not hand it over to trustees for her sole and personal use : oh, no ! not if I know it.'

"The young man said this with a knowing look, which was intended to betoken great and unlimited cunning and cleverness, in both of which qualities he was lamentably deficient.

"How do you know this ?

"I have made a voyage of discovery, and seen a copy of the will. Old Harlowe, you know, left two daughters, and he bequeathed each of them ten thousand pounds ; one—the eldest—is Letitia, and she is the one, I suppose, I shall have to make my wife, for if affairs are as bad as you represent them, I must do something to keep our heads above water. I can't see you wanting anything in your old age, so I will sacrifice myself for the family weal.'

"I wish you were a little steadier, Reginald,' said the old man ; 'I am afraid the poor girl will not have a happy home with you.'

"If I am not so steady as I might be,' said Reginald, 'she is not so pretty and good-looking as she might be ; it is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.'

"I do not see that at all. Nature made Miss Harlowe's face, but it did not make you dissolute and vicious. If you cannot behave better than you do at present, Reginald, don't marry the girl for my sake. I do not wish to see anyone made unhappy for me. I can gain admission to the Charterhouse, I daresay, and end my days there in comparative peace. You must do what you can ; I have educated

you, and given you a profession, and if you do not choose to take advantage of those two blessings, it is your fault, and you must take your chance.'

"Mr. Carleton spoke these words with severity.

" 'I shall not make the girl miserable. I intend to settle down, and have a model household, and make a model husband,' replied Reginald; 'those men who are a little wild when they are young generally make the best husbands.'

" 'That is an old saying, but I doubt its truth; I do, indeed, Reginald.'

" 'If you are sceptical, I must leave you to the enjoyment of your unbelief. I am too ill to talk any longer this morning,' replied the surgeon. 'Trust everything to me, and I will answer for it everything comes right in the end. I shall marry Miss Harlowe, and then we shall be able to pay our debts and go-a-head again.'

"The old man gravely shook his head.

"Reginald drank his tea, and made an attempt to eat a herring, but he egregiously failed: he had been drinking all night, and he could not touch anything. He speedily went upstairs to bed and left Mr. Carleton to think over the state of affairs, and wring his honest heart by vain attempts to devise a way out of endless difficulties.

"FLORENCE LEAVES SCHOOL.

"It would have been difficult to find a gayer or lighter-hearted girl than Florence Harlowe; her smile was like a sunbeam. She did not know how

to frown, and an angry exclamation never escaped her lips. She had during a three years' sojourn in France acquired some of the volatility of the French character, and this, added to her natural flow of spirits, made her the most charming of companions.

"She made friends wherever she went, and was a universal favourite.

"Florence had been away three years, during which time Mrs. Harlowe had not thought it worth while to let her come back, for even a two months' holiday; this was a little hard upon Florence, but with her usual light-heartedness she laughed her sorrow away, and soon became reconciled to her lot.

"Before leaving home for Paris, she had solemnly promised a boy about her own age that she would marry him on her return. They had broken a ring in half, each keeping one, and Florence had placed the fragmentary bauble amongst her most precious treasures, and kept it in the most sacred part of her writing desk. So it was natural that when she saw her mother and sister, she should, after the first rapturous greeting was over, inquire for Henry Meade, but they could give her no intelligence respecting him. During the incessant mutations of three years, they had lost sight of him altogether.

"When the sisters were able to retire and leave their mother, they chose a secluded corner of the drawing-room, and, partly hidden by the heavy drapery which shaded the window, they indulged in a secret conversation.

“‘And so you really know nothing of poor Henry Meade?’ said Florence.

“‘Absolutely nothing.’

“Florence looked disappointed.

“‘And yet,’ said her sister, hastily, ‘I think some one told me that he had gone to America.’

“‘Oh! good gracious!’ exclaimed Florence. ‘If he has gone there, heaven have mercy upon him! he might be conscripted, and made to fight, and get shot. Oh! how dreadful! But tell me about yourself, darling; I am dying to know if you are *fiancée* yet; you hinted at something of the sort in one of your last letters; who is the favoured mortal? shall I like him? is he dark or fair?’

“‘How you run on, Flory,’ said her sister, who had in vain endeavoured to check her volubility.

“‘Oh, but you must tell me; I have no secrets from you, and I insist upon it with the supreme authority of a sister. Disobey me at your peril.’

“She held up her finger warningly.

“‘He is fair,’ said Letty.

“‘Oh! then I am sure I shall like him. I adore fair men. I think they are so much handsomer than dark. Don’t introduce him to me, Letty, or I shall rob you of your sweetheart.’

“Letitia smiled in a sickly manner, as if she more than half-suspected there was something prophetic in this remark.

“‘You have not told me yet what he is by profession,’ exclaimed Flory. ‘Is he a soldier? Oh, I hope he is a soldier. Some officers in the Cent Garde, who had sisters at the *Pensionat*, came to

our yearly ball, and I danced with nearly all of them, and they did whirl one round so beautifully, Letty. I declare, one great big fellow nearly took me off my feet more than once. Is he a soldier? You shake your head. Is he a lawyer? No. An artist, a sailor, an architect, a doctor?

“‘Yes, at last you have guessed it.’

“‘Oh, a doctor—a medical man; well, I shall get my drugs for nothing when I am ill, that’s one comfort,’ exclaimed Florence, with a laugh. ‘When shall I see him, Letty?’

“There was a loud knock at the door. Letty with pardonable curiosity drew the window curtains on one side and took a peep at the steps; upon them she saw Reginald Carleton.

“‘Here he is, I declare,’ she cried; ‘how odd that we should be talking of him!’

“‘Is it he really?’ asked Florence; ‘because I must look very demure, and pretend that I do not know he is making up to you. You shall see how cold and distant I will be to him; or shall I be very civil and polite, and try and make you jealous? Fancy you having a sweetheart! I suppose you will be getting married soon, and then I shall have to stop at home with mamma and look after the house.’

“This remark was accompanied with a dolorous expression, which would have made anyone believe that the prospect she conjured up was very dreadful to her.

“In another moment Reginald Carleton was ushered in. Mrs. Harlowe had gone upstairs, so

hat in hand he approached Letty and shook her proffered hand in an affectionate and cordial manner while he bowed to Florence.

“‘Mr. Carleton—my sister,’ exclaimed Letty.

“‘Happy to have the honour of making Miss Harlowe’s acquaintance,’ said Reginald, looking critically at Florence, who returned his gaze unflinchingly, and with rather more boldness than most English girls educated in England would have ventured upon.

“In spite of the worthlessness of his character, and his habits of dissipation, it was undeniable that the young surgeon was very handsome. His auburn hair clustered in thick wavy tresses over his forehead, which was at once bold and high ; his eyes were full and lustrous, and his features perfect ; he was broad-chested and his shoulders were big ; he was tall, and when he had not been out late or drinking overnight he presented a very creditable appearance, for he knew how to dress himself in a gentlemanly manner, and he had an easy and suave address which was pleasant and captivating.

“Florence thought him very handsome, and considered that her sister’s taste was unexceptionable. After a few minutes the conversation became general, and in the course of it Reginald addressed several of his remarks to Florence, accompanying them, when Letty was not looking, with an impassioned glance.

“‘Oh, fancy ! the man is making eyes at me,’ was Florence’s mental exclamation ; ‘what *would* Letty think if she saw it ? I must be as still as a

little mouse, or I shall get a scolding for being coquettish and a flirt. Well, if they had wanted me to be a prude they should not have sent me to Paris.'

"In spite of her determination to be 'as quiet as a mouse,' she stole several sly glances at the handsome doctor, which he did not fail to notice.

"'Christmas will soon be here,' remarked Reginald Carleton, 'and I see the almanacs predict frost and snow.'

"'Do they?' cried Florence; 'oh, how nice! Wont I go out in the garden and snowball everyone!'

"'Even me?' he asked.

"'Yes; why not, if you venture near enough?'

"'I shall throw myself upon your sister's sovereign protection.'

"'She will not be able to help you. I shall be queen of the revels, because I am the youngest; and Letty thinks any boisterous sort of fun beneath her dignity, which she would not for worlds compromise by indulging in any Tom-boy sort of romp.'

"'We are going to give a ball on Christmas-day,' remarked Letty, with a view of changing the conversation.

"'May I hope for an invitation?' said Reginald, with a well-simulated expression of anxiety.

"'Cela depend,' exclaimed Florence, with a roguish smile.

"'Upon what?' he inquired.

"'Your good behaviour. If Letty approves of your conduct during the last month, mamma shall

send you a card ; if not, you shall be placed amongst the *enfants perdus*.'

"Oh, you tiresome little puss, run away, do ! cried Letty, who was getting angry.

"Florence went away laughing, and seating herself at the table, began to turn over the leaves of some keepsake, and pretending to be much interested in their contents. When she tired of that, she took up a photographic album, and made remarks of an uncomplimentary nature upon all those which fell beneath her notice.

"Suddenly she ran to the window, exclaiming in the language she had been compelled to speak for three years past, and which was more habitual to her than her native tongue, '*Voilà ! il commence à neiger*,' and as she spoke, the great heavy, but beautifully white and crystallized snow-flakes began to fall in a perfect shower.

"The newly-emancipated school-girl clapped her hands with delight.

"'Oh ! isn't the old woman picking her geese !' she cried.

"Steadily the flakes descended, floating this way and that way ; alighting on the frozen ground and settling there ; pitching upon the quickly-walking pedestrian, and making him as white as a miller ; smothering the horses in a milk-white canopy, and dazzling the eyes with the monotony of their descent.

"'Winter at last !' exclaimed Reginald.

"'Yes, and at the most pleasant time,' said Florence 'it only wants a week now to Christmas-

day. We shall have one of those dear old Christmases which are so thoroughly enjoyable. Give me a hard Christmas ; anything but a wet one. I like snow and frost and ice from the twenty-fifth of December to the sixth of January. Hurrah ! for the snow ; I love it !

“ ‘ You don’t seem to think of the poor wretches who have no fire, and who have no clothes and nothing to eat,’ said Letty, rather spitefully, looking crossly at her sister.

“ ‘ Oh, yes ! I’m sure I do,’ replied Florence, whose eyes dimmed with genuine pity ; ‘ and I shall set to and make some warm woollen things for the poor people, and I shall go without a new linsey, and save up all my money and send it to the poor-box.’

“ Reginald looked admiringly at Florence ; he thought her childish manner was very fascinating, and he thought her innocent observations quite charming.

“ After stopping an hour and a half, he said, ‘ I must run away.’

“ ‘ Oh, don’t go yet,’ said Florence, who liked his society. She was going to add something else, but she noticed that Letty’s eyes were fixed upon her with such an angry look that she checked herself.

“ ‘ I have a professional engagement which I cannot neglect,’ said Reginald.

“ ‘ A professional engagement’ was an amiable fiction with which Mr. Carleton was in the habit of deluding society. He wished to make his friends believe that his mind was always full of matter of

life and death, and he frequently in an absent mood scribbled *Pil. hydrarg.* upon a window-pane with a diamond ring, as if he were writing a prescription.

“ ‘ Well, if you must go, I hope we shall see you soon again,’ said Letty.

“ When the young surgeon found himself in the street, he hurried along in the blinding snow, and pulled his coat closely around him, but he did not go home, nor did he travel to the house of a patient ; he went to his favourite tobacconist’s, and sitting down, smoked a tolerable Havannah in a moody and abstracted manner.

“ ‘ You seem a cup too low to-day, Mr. Carleton!’ exclaimed the proprietor of the shop, who generally knew the surgeon as a lively if not a disputatious customer.

“ ‘ I am thinking, Pipes,’ he returned. ‘ I am going to get married, and I have my choice of girls, and hang me if I know which to take!’

“ The fact was that Mr. Reginald Carleton had fallen head over ears in love with Florence. It was a very striking instance of love at first sight. He had never loved Letty—he had only cared for her because she was in a small way an heiress, and had ten thousand pounds.

“ But Florence also had ten thousand pounds. Why should he not have beauty, money, and a lively disposition altogether?

“ This was the thought which was agitating his mind.

“ ‘ I think I will throw the plain sister over, and take the pretty one,’ he said to himself. ‘ I don’t

at all see why I should not ; I could love Florence Harlowe, and since I have seen her, I positively dislike Letty.'

"Mr. Carleton was venturing upon dangerous ground, but he did not see the pitfalls before him.

"FLIRTING.

"BOTH Letitia and Florence Harlowe looked forward with the greatest expectation and anxiety to the Christmas ball their mother was about to give. A ball is at all times an object of pleasurable excitement to a girl like Florence, who passionately adored dancing ; it was an event—an epoch.

"For a week before Christmas the house was turned upside down ; there were so many things to be done. The supper had to be ordered, the dancing-room arranged, Coote's band to be engaged, for the best music was indispensable.

"All the weighty part of the work was done by Letitia. She was the only one of the family who possessed a talent for managing and organization. Florence ran in a wild and purposeless manner about the house, moving chairs and tables from one room to another, and then moving them back again. She began to make chaplets of paper flowers, and left a dozen unfinished ; and she tried her hand at adorning a colossal Christmas tree, but without any result further than decorating it here and there with tapers and parti-coloured ribands, hanging a drum here, a fife there, and a bag of sweetmeats in another place. She would spend two minutes at

the foot of the tree pretending to work very hard indeed, then she would run over to her sister, who was busily engaged in writing the invitations for the ball, and say—

“‘Oh, Letty, how nicely you write! Do let me look. Are you going to ask all these people?’

“‘Go away and don’t bother,’ was the ungracious reply she would receive.

“‘Don’t send me away yet. I want to have a peep—just one little peep, there’s a dear good Letty. Who are the Joneses? Those people I used to know?’

“‘How frivolous you are—you worry my life out!’

“‘Oh, no, I don’t. Who is Sir Barton Brett?’

“‘A baronet—a friend of papa’s.’

“‘Is he coming?’

“‘I think so.’

“‘Is he young?’

“‘About thirty.’

“‘I shall make up to him,’ cried Florence; ‘I should so like to be Lady something, and be addressed as your ladyship.’

“‘Really, Flory, you are incorrigible,’ exclaimed Letty, angrily; ‘go away and do something, or go out for a walk—at all events leave me alone. You are not only idle yourself, but the cause of idleness in others.’

“Mrs. Harlowe’s drawing-room presented a very creditable appearance on the arrival of the auspicious day. Mr. Reginald Carleton had called in the morning to accompany the young ladies to

church. On their way home from the High Church tabernacle in Knightsbridge, which they had selected as their place of worship, they took a stroll in Kensington Gardens.

“‘Have you arranged your programme for this evening, Miss Harlowe?’ inquired Reginald.

“‘Oh, yes! and a capital one it is, too,’ exclaimed Florence; ‘come for a walk under the trees, and I’ll tell you all about it.’

“Lettie looked astonished and disgusted, saying to herself—‘How rude she is!’

“Mrs. Harlowe said, in a freezing tone—

“‘Mr. Carleton did not address himself to you, Florence; he was speaking to your sister.’

“‘Oh! never mind, mamma; I know poor Letty’s tired, and it will save her the trouble of talking. You and Letty can sit down on that seat while we stroll up the broad walk and see who’s who.’

“Mrs. Harlowe was literally astounded at such audacity; she was mute with surprise, and Florence taking her silence for consent, ran away with her sister’s beau, saying—

“‘Come along, Mr. Carleton, we will leave the old people by themselves.’

“As they disappeared in the throng walking up and down the broad walk, Letitia looked blankly at her mother, and exclaimed in a tremulous voice—

“‘Oh, mamma! did you ever in your whole life see such a thing? I don’t know what to do. I should like to run home and have a good cry.’

“‘I really must confess that I am fairly astonished,’ replied Mrs. Harlowe. ‘The impudence

and effrontery of the whole affair was so consummate. I must talk to Florence, and talk earnestly, too. If she only went to Paris to learn such boldness of demeanour, I regret that she ever went at all. She does not mean any harm, of that I am positive ; nor does she think that she is wounding your feelings by her thoughtless behaviour ; but it is very reprehensible conduct in a young lady.'

" 'And he's as bad as Flory,' said Letty, with a hysteric gasp. 'He ought to know better than to go off with my sister before my eyes. I don't mind Flory so much as I do Mr. Carleton—he ought to be ashamed of himself. I shall never speak to him again—never—never—never.'

" 'Oh, yes, you will, my dear child ; it would have required great strength of mind on his part to resist Florence's impetuous appeal to accompany her up the broad walk—you must think of that.'

" 'I would not give a straw for a man if he was not strong-minded. Men ought to be strong,' said Letty, a little savagely.

" 'Punish him by not dancing with him this evening.'

" 'But he will dance with somebody else, mamma, and that will be a thousand times worse—I shall sit biting my nails in the corner.'

" 'Oh, no ! indeed you will not ; as we give the ball every man in the room will feel it incumbent to ask you to dance. Show yourself independent of him.'

" 'Although I do not exactly love him, mamma,' said Letty, clinging tightly to her mother's hand,

‘I feel that—that——. I cannot tell you exactly what I feel ; but I am intensely miserable.’

“ ‘My poor Letty !’ exclaimed Mrs. Harlowe ; ‘this is only one of those storm clouds one continually meets with through life.’

“ Whilst the mother was endeavouring to console the daughter, Florence and Mr. Reginald Carleton were carrying on a flirtation of a dangerous description.

“ The broad walk was thronged with people gaily dressed, and talking to one another in that solemn, sedate, and highly-decorous style peculiar to English ladies and gentlemen. Florence was a brilliant exception ; she talked and laughed, and sometimes almost sang some of her poetical sentences. Reginald was for once in his life really captivated. He loved Florence ; he thought her the most thoroughly loveable girl it had ever been his good fortune to meet with. He loved her for her auburn hair (so untidily kept, hastily brushed out, and pushed into a chenille net every morning ‘all of a lump’) ; for her vivacious prattle (sometimes mischievous, never solid and sedate) ; for her pretty, good-humoured, sparkling face, with its honest Saxon features—rather peachy cheeks, and a nose not altogether to be acquitted of a tendency to ‘turn up.’

“ Girls always know when they are loved—it is difficult to say how or why. Perhaps some magnetic current rushes from the man’s heart into hers, and, for the sake of argument, perhaps it doesn’t. Anyhow Florence knew that Reginald loved her better than he did her sister, and with a mischievous

twinkle in her wicked and roguish eye, she exclaimed—

“ ‘Do you not wish you had met me some months ago, before you saw my sister, Mr. Carleton?’

“ ‘Why should I?’ he asked, skilfully evading a response, so as to throw his enemy into confusion.

“ ‘But the enemy would not be confused. There was a reserve in the background—a reserve of impudence of which he knew nothing.

“ ‘Because,’ she replied, ‘Letty might—I don’t wish to be uncharitable, but Letty might—be prettier than she is.’

“ ‘I always thought your sister charming, until——’

“ ‘He broke off abruptly.

“ ‘Until when?’ she asked, fixing a searching glance upon him.

“ ‘Until I saw you.’

“ ‘Oh! Mr. Carleton, that is very wrong,’ cried Florence, averting her face.

“ ‘She pretended to be indignant with him for making such a declaration, even in jest—forgetting that she alone was to blame for it, as she had led him on, and provoked everything that he might say.

“ ‘You seem to have forgotten,’ she added, ‘that we left mamma and Letty in order that I should tell you all about the ball. I shall not allow the conversation to wander from its original limit; you are a false and recreant knight, and I give you warning that I shall report everything you say, word for word, to Letty.’

“‘You must not do that; I should have my *congé* given me directly.’

“‘And it would be just what you deserve. Oh! you need not look at me in that pleading manner, I mean what I say. It is simply infamous for a man who is *fiancé*, and I don’t know what else, to quit his allegiance and say pretty things to another young lady.’

“Reginald could not help smiling at these mock heroics, which very well became a coquette such as Florence undeniably was.

“‘If I am so infamous as you say, permit me to take you back to your mother and sister,’ he said.

“‘No, thank you; not yet—I am enjoying myself. A little bird who is caged all day likes a little freedom now and then, if it is only sufficient to flutter its poor wings,’ replied Florence. ‘I was going to tell you about the ball—let me see, where shall I begin?—oh! the band. We have some excellent musicians, and nearly ninety people are coming. It will be a great success. Are you fond of dancing?’

“‘Very fond,’ said Reginald; ‘it is one of the few things I really do like.’

“‘You are not a wall-flower in a ball-room—you do not stand in the passages, or sit on the stairs, and complain of the heat?’

“‘I always try to please my numerous admirers,’ replied Reginald, who was slightly conceited.

“‘Have you any admirers?’

“‘May I presume to place you at the head of the list?’

"‘Me!’ repeated Florence, contemptuously.

"‘Well, your sister, then, if you disdain the honour.’

"‘The honour!—oh, how amusing you are!’ laughed Florence. ‘You may place Letty at the head of your list if you like—there is no accounting for taste.’

"At this speech Mr. Carleton laughed heartily. He saw that although Florence was good-tempered and good-humoured she could occasionally be sarcastic.

"‘That is very unkind,’ he replied; ‘you are too hard upon me.’

"‘Not at all; an engaged man is certainly private property, but still it is permissible to make what remarks one likes upon him and his *cara sposa*.’

"‘Tell me something more about the ball,’ asked Reginald, wishing to turn the conversation.

"‘What do you wish to know?’

"‘In the first place, who is coming?’

"‘Shall I give you the minnows swimming amongst the tritons, or the big guns?’

"‘Oh! by all means let me hear the names of the big guns.’

"‘There is Lady Maizena—her husband invented the corn flour, and was knighted for it. She brings two unmarried daughters, very ugly and very stupid. They can only talk about maize and the hundred and one ways of growing it.’

"Reginald smiled at this vivid description, and said—

"‘I shall avoid the Maizena party.’

"‘Why?’ asked Florence, elevating her eyebrows.

"‘Because stupidity and ugliness taken singly are anything but agreeable, when united they are simply unbearable.’

"‘I suppose I may infer from that that I am neither ugly nor stupid?’

"‘You are very pretty.’

"‘So I have heard before,’ replied Florence, with a calm smile of approval.

"‘Indeed!’

"‘Oh, yes. They can appreciate pretty faces in Paris as well as in London.’

"‘It does great credit to their discrimination and their taste,’ said Reginald, hardly knowing what to say.

"‘Have you finished your interruptions for the next two minutes?’ asked Florence.

"‘Quite.’

"‘Very well; then I will go on with my catalogue. The next big gun is the Honourable Minto Money.’

"‘What a delightful name!’

"‘It means nothing, for he is as poor as a church mouse, if not poorer. Then there is Sir Barton Brett.’

"‘Brett!’ repeated Reginald.

"‘Yes; do you know him?’

"‘Indifferently well: he attended some clinical lectures at my hospital; men who knew him spoke very highly of him, and said he was a charming fellow.’

“‘Indeed! Herc we are at the top of the long walk; we must reverse it. Is not that mamma and Letty? I declare they are coming to meet us.’

“‘How tiresome!’ ejaculated Reginald.

“‘Why?’

“‘Because I have not had an opportunity of saying half as much to you as I could have wished.

“‘You are insatiable; we have had a long *tête-à-tête*.’

“‘May I engage you for the *première danse* this evening?’

“‘No. It is sure to be a square dance, and I abominate square dances; besides——’

“‘What?’

“‘You are Letty’s property, and she will chain you down for the first half dozen.’

“‘Suppose I will not be chained; suppose I refuse to be enslaved?’

“Florence was about to reply, when Mrs. Harlowe and Letty appeared upon the scene.

“‘Florence!’ exclaimed Mrs. Harlowe, ‘it is time to go home.’

“Her voice was cold, and her manner icy in the extreme.

“Reginald Carleton looked everywhere but in Letitia’s direction. He was roused by Mrs. Harlowe, who again spoke, saying—

“‘Good-morning, Mr. Carleton; we are much obliged to you for your escort.’

“‘Allow me to see you home.’

“‘Thanks; we will not trouble you.’

“With this reply, Mrs. Harlowe marched off in

triumph with her two daughters, like a hen with two chicks.

"Mr. Carleton raised his hat, and as the taverns were just open for the sale of wines, he wended his way to one to obtain some sherry-and-bitters to give him an appetite for dinner, thinking the while 'what a very pretty and charming girl Florence Harlowe is.'

"THE BALL.

"On the eventful evening the road in front of Mrs. Harlowe's house was a scene of excitement. It was dark and foggy; snow lay on the ground half-an-inch thick, and it had in some places been trodden down and made hard and slippery by the efforts of pedestrians, sliding boys, and the frost.

"A snowy canopy covered the house-tops, and the sky, when the beholder could see it, was white and clear; the Serpentine was frozen over, and so were all the pieces of ornamental water in the parks; skating was a general amusement, and more than one enthusiastic disciple of the art was submerged and got a thorough ducking.

"In the road before Mrs. Harlowe's house sand and sawdust had been sprinkled, so that the carriages and—shall we say it—the cabs might draw up without danger and with ease. Link-boys had been hired in large numbers—Mrs. Harlowe was great in the matter of link-boys and men, and would have them regardless of cost; it gave *éclat* to the party to have a good attendance outside as well as inside the house. When visitors are lighted

out of their carriages on a foggy night, and lighted up the steps and into the house, they like it; they enter the hospitable domicile of the friend of their bosom with the consolatory reflection that no expense has been spared to do them honour—they like to have honour done them. The middle classes especially like it, because it shows that the expenditure they have gone to in the matter of skirts, bodies, wreaths, gloves, and shoes, is not thrown away. In a morning call, the civility of an affable footman, whether plushed and powdered or otherwise, is gratifying, because it evidences that his mistress keeps him for the express purpose of announcing her visitors who call upon her to let her see that they are *au fait* with the newest fashions, and have bought bonnets without curtains, and are decidedly in favour of velvet trimmings.

“At about eight o’clock the arrivals commenced in earnest; before that time a few straggling broughams and cabs had made their appearance and set down their living freight, but these early comers were nobodies in particular; they were not big guns—decidedly not big guns. These latter exalted personages never arrive until late, when the entry into a crowded room shall be productive of a sensation, which is flattering to the vanity of those who tower above their neighbours, as the ‘Mushroom’ at Kew towers above the green-houses and the palm-preserves.

“The early arrivals shook Mrs. Harlowe by the hand in a tremulous sort of way, as if the cold had done them grievous bodily harm, and they really

could not thaw until they had crowded round the fire and nearly set their flimsy skirts on fire.

"When they had shaken Mrs. Harlowe by the hand, they inquired after the health of her daughters, and those amiable young ladies made themselves agreeable to other amiable young ladies who had come out to enjoy themselves, and were already beginning to look critically at the young gentlemen who had made their appearance, and when their thoughts wandered from these young gentlemen in consequence of their eyes being glutted with gazing, they wondered how long it would be before the dancing commenced, and whether the supper would be a good one.

"Miss Wright, who was always oracular on matters connected with parties, said in a whisper to her most intimate friend Rosina, that 'she could have made a much better Christmas tree than that, and that she did not entirely approve of the decorations, and what a guy Letty Harlowe looked with a white muslin and a pink chemisette.'

"These exclamations, which may seem ill-natured to the uninitiated reader, were nothing more or less than the commonplaces in which young ladies, in the absence of anything more worthy of their attention, such as a handsome young guardsman, delight to talk about.

"Letty was not in very high spirits, but she did her best. Florence was not acquainted with all the guests, and the ceremony of introduction had to be gone through in dozens of instances.

"Miss Wright took a dislike to Florence directly

she set eyes upon her; she declared that she was bold and impudent.

“‘Oh, I know I shall not like that girl,’ she exclaimed to her dear friend Rosina, fluttering her sandal-wood fan as she spoke; ‘she is much too forward for me. Did you ever see such assurance? look at her!’

“Florence was happily ignorant of the animadversions which were being made upon her, and she went from one to the other talking and laughing, and when requested, sat down at the piano and sang a French song beginning with—

“Epris d’amour pour la jeune Clémène,
J’ai soupiré pour elle une jour ou deux.”

“She sang without affectation, and the simple love-ditty with which she favoured her hearers was received with an applause which was well deserved. She knew she could sing a tolerable song, although she did not aspire to that excellence in art which seldom belongs to the amateur, and is, more strictly speaking, the inalienable and indefinable property of the professional. Her only wish was to please her hearers to the best of her ability, and in that wish she succeeded beyond her expectation.

“When the room was filled, and the musicians had made their dulcet notes audible, the dancing began. Reginald Carleton was a man wise in his generation, and he knew that if he sought the drawing-room of Mrs. Harlowe at an early hour Letitia would accost him, and either treat him coldly or give him a severe lecture upon his incon-

stancy; so he lighted a cigar (when was he not lighting cigars?) and sat still over a bottle of port wine in his father's drawing-room, musing over the mutability of human affairs.

"At ten o'clock he made his appearance, and was received coldly by Mrs. Harlowe. He pushed his way through the crowd, after doing homage to the evening sun, and sought the minor stars.

"Florence and Letty were together. They were each cavaliered, but not in the least abashed, Reginald said to Florence—

"‘I think I have the honour for the next dance?’

"‘Is it round or square?’ asked Florence, with a smile.

"Remembering her observation about square dances, Reginald was prudent enough to reply—

"‘It is a waltz.’ He knew nothing about the list of dances, beginning with a waltz, a schottische, a polka, a redowa (the Harlowes were so old-fashioned as to dance redowas and schottisches); a set of quadrilles, a waltz (Faust of course); another polka, the Lancers, waltz, schottische, Caledonians, waltz, and *da capo*.

"But although he was ignorant of the order of the dances, he was rash enough to assert that the next Terpsichorean movement of a saltatory nature was of a roundabout kind.

"The gentleman who had been dancing with Florence was of the highly-fledged order. That is to say, his shirt was magnificently embroidered, his cornelian-and-turquoise waistcoat-buttons were of the best description, and his white tie was im-

maculate as to its purity, and not badly tied. He wore an eyeglass, and reconnoitred Reginald through it with the air of a man who felt himself personally aggrieved at some imaginary insult. When he had finished his scrutiny, he looked at his card of the dances, which he had gracefully suspended from the button-hole of his coat, and exclaimed—

“‘I beg your pardon, but the next dance is a quadrille.’

“‘Oh! so it is. Thank you for correcting me, exclaimed Reginald, with ready wit. ‘It was a quadrille I meant. Miss Harlowe, permit me.’

“He offered her his arm as he spoke, and Florence accepted it, leaving her companion the prey of unenviable emotions.

“‘It is not *comme il faut* to kick a man in a ball-room, neither is it etiquette to use high-flown language to him; had it been, the individual with the eyeglass would have indulged in an *opera di camera*, in which the *mise en scène* would have been admirable; for there would have been a tearful young lady, an assault and battery, an injured gentleman, and one indignant ditto.

“Letty did not appear to notice Reginald’s conduct, although she could not help being fully aware of what was going on, considering that she was standing within a few feet of her sister. But although she did not notice it she felt it, and felt it deeply.

“She had, it is true, behaved a little cavalierly to Reginald in the morning, but he had provoked her treatment by walking with Florence in prefer-

ence to sitting down quietly and talking to her. With the natural perversity of women she loved Reginald more when he treated her badly than she had ever done before. She longed for his companionship when it was denied her, and she ardently wished for his society when it was placed without her reach.

"She would not, however, permit him to witness her chagrin; and with a view of disguising her real feelings she talked in a vivacious way to her companion, and appeared to have met with a man in whose society she could pass her time agreeably. In fact, she appeared to be oblivious of Reginald's presence.

"Florence took his arm and they selected a place, although they left the matter of *vis-à-vis* an open question. By one of the most singular accidents, just as the dancing was about to begin, the master of the ceremonies placed Letty and her partner opposite to them.

"Here was a *contretemps*. The music had already commenced, and the first bars of the quadrille were played, so that it was impossible to effect an alteration without making a scene. This neither of the Miss Harlowes wished to do.

"Florence, in her simplicity, didn't think she had been guilty of anything wrong; had she thought that there was any impropriety in her conduct she would have been the last to have been guilty of it. It must be recollected that she was only a school girl, and consequently ignorant of the ways of the world, and the manner in which its pomps and vanities are managed.

"She did not consider that she was doing any harm in dancing with Reginald; her sole idea was that she was indulging in a little innocent rivalry with her sister.

"During the first set Letty did not look at her sister, although she passed her and took hold of her hand in 'ladies' chain' Reginald was confused and conscience-stricken, but he endeavoured to hide his confusion by talking to Florence with as much vivacity as his quondam sweetheart was talking to her partner. The vivacity of both was forced, but they acted their parts well.

" 'Why did you single me out?' asked Florence.

" 'Because I preferred dancing with you.'

" 'And what a story you told about the dances. I suppose you did that to get me away from the man I was with. Look at Letty; she doesn't seem to care a bit about our being together. You must dance with her before you go away. I should, if I were you, go directly after this quadrille and make it up.'

" 'I have nothing to make up. I am not aware that I have been guilty of any offence,' replied Reginald.

"Reginald had forgotten that he was dancing, and he had neglected to pay attention to the music. The consequence was that he was standing still when he ought to have been advancing. Florence gave him a push, and said—

" 'It is your turn—*pouffe*. Have you forgotten the figure?'

"When the music ceased, the young surgeon

breathed an aspiration of heartfelt thankfulness. During the walk round the room Reginald said to Florence, as her hand reposed lightly upon his arm—

“‘Will you let me speak earnestly to you, and promise not to laugh at me?’

“She looked at him wonderingly with her large blue eyes.

“‘I have never tried to conceal my admiration for you. Since I have seen you I would lay down my life for you.’

“‘Oh! that would be too great a sacrifice,’ she replied, casting down her eyes.

“‘No sacrifice would be too great to gain your love.’

“‘My love, Mr. Carleton?’

“‘Yes. I——’

“But she said—‘Have you forgotten that you are engaged to my sister?’

“‘I cannot help that; I have never been formally engaged. It has all along been a sort of mutual understanding.’

“‘And is not that binding upon an honourable man?’

“‘Do not distract me,’ said Reginald, eagerly. ‘I have not time now to plunge into an ethical disquisition. I can only say, in terse and simple language, I love you.’

“‘But you must not tell me so—it is wrong. I—I cannot listen to you, Mr. Carleton; I cannot, indeed,’ replied Florence, who felt alarmed at the vehemence of the young man’s manner, and fearful of what might be the result of her coquetry.

“She had never for a moment so much as dreamed

that her flirtation, which as a Parisian she had deemed innocent and harmless, would result in the alienation of Reginald's affections from her sister, to whom they of right belonged.

"‘You *must* listen to me,’ cried Reginald, passionately. ‘I love you, and I cannot disguise my love.’

"Florence was about to reply, when a gentleman exclaimed—

"‘How do you do, Miss Florence? It is a long time since we had the pleasure of meeting. I hope—poor insignificant mortal that I am—that I have not been forgotten?’

"‘Sir Barton Brett!’ ejaculated Florence. ‘Oh, I am charmed to see you!’

"‘You flatter me beyond my poor deserts. I have a young friend with me who was accustomed in days of yore to bask in your smiles—may I present him?’

"As Sir Barton Brett said this, Florence perceived that the baronet was accompanied by a good-looking young man, about nineteen years of age. No sooner did she catch sight of his features than she gave vent to a tiny cry, and exclaimed—

"‘Harry!—is it really you? Come and shake hands. It is positively delightful to see you again. I have, ever since my return from Paris, been asking all the people I met about you, and no one seemed to know what had become of you.’

"‘Mr. Meade is a clerk in the famous house of Rollingold and Silverbars,’ said Sir Barton Brett; ‘and he has not, I assure you, forgotten the young

lady in the ringlets who vowed an eternal fidelity.'

" 'What do you know about fidelity, whether eternal or transitory, Sir Barton?' exclaimed Florence. 'Please be good enough to mind your own business.'

" 'I stand rebuked,' said the baronet.

" Henry Meade was the boy who had broken a ring in half with Florence on her departure for France three years ago. He was an acquaintance of Sir Barton Brett, and had been for two years a clerk holding a confidential position in a celebrated banking-house in Lombard-street.

" 'Mr. Carleton, you must excuse me,' said Florence; 'I have met an old friend. Run away to Letty—see! she is sitting by herself. She will be glad of so delightful a partner as yourself; and'—she added, lowering her voice—'if you say all the soft and pretty things to her which you have said to me, you will be married before the new year is far advanced. Am I wrong—am I a false prophet?'

" Reginald Carleton grew very red in the face, and made no reply. The presence of Sir Barton Brett and Henry Meade was a restraint upon him. The meeting between Florence and those two gentlemen had taken place at a most inopportune time. If he had been allowed by fate five minutes longer he could have told whether or not he was utterly indifferent to Florence. At present he was in a horrible state of suspense and uncertainty.

" Letitia Harlowe was sitting by herself, near a

conservatory which had been fitted up with rare exotics and precious plants, on a lounge for those who were tired of dancing. Reginald cast his eyes in her direction, and thought about the advisability of making some advance. Florence was taken by storm, and he could not hope to dance with or have an opportunity of speaking to her until some hours had elapsed, so that he was disengaged for some time to come. In what better way could he employ this time than in talking to Letty, whom he had not treated too well, and whom, though he did not like, he could not afford to despise?

"He was, he flattered himself, in the position of the man who had two strings to his bow. Letty was one string, Florence was the other, and so consummate was his assurance and conceit that he thought himself secure of Florence's love if Letty refused him, and secure of Letty's affection if Florence would have nothing to say to him.

"So he walked across the room to Letty, and exclaimed—

"‘It is very kind of you to wait for me. I should not have spoken to your sister had I not seen you with some one else.’

"‘It was merely a complimentary dance,’ replied Letty. ‘But allow me to disabuse your mind of one idea, and that is, that I am waiting here for you. I am simply sitting here because I am tired and require a little rest, Mr. Carleton.

"‘I saw you refuse three gentlemen who asked you to dance.’

"‘Possibly you did,’ replied Letty, looking at the

mistletoe and holly with which the spacious apartment was adorned.

“‘Why did you not dance with them?’

“‘Am I obliged to dance with everyone who asks me?’

“‘Certainly not.’

“The music began, and Reginald, allowing himself to be carried away by his thoughts, looked in Florence’s direction. She was already whirling in the giddy valse with Henry Meade.

“Letty watched his glance with one as quick and subtle as his own.

“‘Do you not wish you were where your thoughts are?’ she said.

“‘I am in that identical spot.’

“‘Are your thoughts with me, then?’

‘Unquestionably they are. How can you ask?’ he replied, with a tender aspiration.

“‘Oh, I don’t know why, Mr. Carleton: ladies will be sceptical occasionally.’

“‘Are you angry with me? Have I in any way offended you?’

“‘Ask yourself.’

“At this juncture Sir Barton Brett advanced, and said—

“‘I hope I am not disturbing an interesting conversation, Miss Harlowe, but if you would so far oblige me as to favour me for once, I should go away from your mother’s hospitable mansion with delight.’

“Sir Barton Brett was forty years old and more, consequently he may be forgiven for being a little

old-fashioned. Letty knew him to be a thoroughly good-hearted gentleman, and she seized the chance of dancing with him with avidity.

"‘I shall be most happy,’ she replied, while a radiant smile overspread her face.

"‘Thanks. It is a valse. Our young friend, Henry Meade, is whirling your sister about regardless of crinoline. His exertions are most praiseworthy.’

"Letitia went away with Sir Barton Brett without saying one word to Reginald Carleton, and he stood rivetted to the floor with anger, grinding a curse between his teeth ; for by neglecting one sister, he seemed to stand a chance of losing both."

Here the manuscript broke off abruptly, and the Laraquez, with a pardonable feeling of irritation at this disappointment, threw herself upon the bed, and soon fell into a heavy slumber. The next morning, very early, Valentine came into her friend's room, and awoke her, saying—

"Come, get you up, lazy ones ! You are fine ones for fighting a duel. If I had not come—if I was not to call you—you would be late. Get you up, lazy ones !"

Skittles turned over drowsily, rubbed her eyes, and said—

"I sat up reading last night."

"Ah ! that was foolish. What did you read ?"

"A manuscript I found in a secret drawer."

"Oh," said Valentine, "I can tell **you** all about that. Poor Reginald !"

"Did you know him?"

"Well."

"He was an old flame of yours, then?"

"The only Englishman I ever loved. He came over here with his heart broken, and he met me. Then he began to write that little tale which you read. He died though before he could finish it—but I cannot tell you now, there is no time. Put you on your armour, and come and be shot at, and kill your mans."

"All right," cried Skittles, jumping up, and proceeding to don her shirt of mail.

She was speedily equipped, and ready for the fight. A carriage awaited them, and the two women were so admirably equipped that it was impossible to tell them from men. The Count de Laraquez was a man with no whiskers, wearing only a moustache and an imperial. His hair was dark, and inclined to curl. These peculiarities Skittles had noticed, and copied to the life.

They had a drive of half an hour before them.

"Shall I do?" said Skittles.

"Admirably!—and I?"

"Oh, you are quite the cheese! I never saw a better get-up."

"You flatter me!"

"Not a bit. How long shall we be going?"

"Half an hour."

"That is nothing."

"Oh, no!"

The hazy, misty indistinctness of the grey dawn made everything look miserable and wretched. It

would be a comfort when the sun rose. The streets were utterly deserted, except by the *gendarmérie* and the *chiffoniers*. These latter were busy with their rakes, and seemed, by their skill and diligence, to have been born ragpickers. Now and then, it is said, they get something valuable in the shape of a piece of money, or a ring, or some other article of jewellery, amongst which diamond ornaments preponderate.

"Tell me about Reginald Carleton," said Skittles; "I felt quite disappointed when the story broke off."

"Shall I have time?"

"Yes; plenty of time—heaps of time."

"Very well. Reginald did not marry either of the girls he mentions in the story, and he did not know what to do. So he went out one day, and picked up a purse with more than two hundred pounds in it. With this he quit England, and go to Paris. In Paris, at Mabilie, he met me, and we became acquainted with one another. I take quite fancy to the young Englishman, and he find out that I love him. Well, we live together, and he went to place in Palais Royal, and gambled to get money to keep me—and he win some. All go on well for two month, and then he tell me his history, and write it out for me in little tale—like you sec just now—but before he could finish it, he got into quarrel at gambling table, and some one run a sword through him, and then the officers they bring his body home to me. I faint at once, and go off into hysterics, and almost die. Poor

Reginald ! he not bad fellow—not at all. Here we are. You get out, Monsieur le Comte de Laraquez, and I will follow with the pistols.”

Skittles alighted, and found herself standing in an open space which looked like an artificial clearing. It was surrounded with trees, and known as the Champ Sanglant—a sort of Golgotha, or a small Gehenna. All the duels that were originated in the city of Paris were fought out on the Champ Sanglant. Every cabdriver knew his way to it ; and the curious and the bloodthirsty often took a walk to this blood-stained spot to witness a hostile encounter between two gentlemen who considered their honour to be aggrieved.

A small knot of people were discernible through the morning mist ; it consisted of Trevelyan, the Marquis of Rollingford, his second, and a surgeon, who was in attendance in case of accidents.

Valentine stepped forward and bowed to the Marquis of Rollingford, whom she knew well, but it was impossible that he could recognise her, because of her moustache and whiskers, her slouch hat, and the deep tone she purposely imparted to her voice.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL.

"Is there no way of arranging this painful and unpleasant affair?" said Rollingford, employing the conventional language appropriate on such occasions.

"I fear not," replied Valentine.

"Will your friend apologize?"

"I have his express instructions to the contrary."

"*Bien!* then we must to business; will you measure the ground, or shall I?"

"You, if you please."

"Good," again said the marquis.

He carefully measured the ground, and the seconds placed their men, or rather their man and woman. The doctor opened his case of surgical instruments so as to be prepared for any emergency, and the marquis loaded the pistols at Valentine's desire. She did not know any more than a baby how to load a pistol, so it was lucky that he did not object to come to the rescue.

Skittles was very pale, but she bore herself bravely, although her hand did tremble a little, more especially when the pistol was placed in it.

"The least pressure will discharge the pistol," said the Marquis of Rollingford; "it has a hair trigger. The signal, gentlemen, will be a clapping of the hands. I shall clap once for you to prepare, twice for you to make ready, and the third, you will be good enough to fire, and Heaven aid the right!"

The principals bowed.

Skittles placed herself sideways, so that she presented a comparatively small surface to be shot at. Trevelyan seemed thoroughly in earnest, for he frowned, and kept his eyes fixed on his adversary with a malignant glare.

Valentine St. Roche was a little nervous. She felt as if she could cry, and would like to go back to the carriage and sit there with her face in her hands until it was all over, but she restrained herself, and stood her ground manfully.

Skittles wished that she had not been so foolhardy as to come. Now that the excitement was over, and the stern reality of the affair stared her in the face—now that the grave was yawning for her body, and death—grim-visaged death—was waving his truculent scythe, and gibing and mocking her—she experienced a natural inclination to throw down her pistol, and exclaim, "Hold, gentlemen, I am a woman!"

There was not much time for thought as the Marquis of Rollingford clapped his hands once, twice, and three times; at the third time Skittles fired her pistol in the air; the next instant something struck her on the side, glanced off the coat of mail, and went flying away at a tangent amongst

the bushes. The shock, however, was so great that she fell violently upon the ground, panting for breath, and thinking herself injured.

Valentine St. Roche was by her side in an instant, willing to render all assistance in her power. The surgeon followed her.

"Rise, rise, if you are not wounded," said Valentine, in a hasty whisper. "The surgeon is here and will examine you ; all will be exposed."

Alarmed at this threatened contingency, Skittles partly rose and leant upon her elbow.

"Allow me," said the surgeon ; "I think I can be of use here ; has the ball penetrated ? is the hæmorrhage great ?"

"Thank you, it is a mere scratch," replied Skittles, summoning all her assurance to her aid. "I am only a little shocked ; my friend will assist me to the carriage ; in fact, I think I can walk alone."

"Strange !" muttered the surgeon ; "the ball should have entered under the fifth rib. It is remarkable. I never saw a more extraordinary case in my life. I am fairly puzzled, I confess."

Valentine assisted Skittles to her feet, and guided her trembling footsteps to the carriage, in which she placed her.

The Marquis of Rollingford advanced to Valentine and said—

"Monsieur——"

"St. Roche."

"Thank you : my principal and myself trust that the Count de Laraquez is not much hurt ?"

"Oh ! no, not at all. It is nothing."

"Mr. Trevelyan is perfectly satisfied, though he begs me to state, that he would rather have been fired at, than that the count should have wasted his shot. Such liberality was not expected by my principal when he faced his opponent, or he would not have fought on such terms."

"You are very good; but we thought it was well known that the count has always refused to fight, on principle."

"It has been said so; are you sure that M. de Laraquez is uninjured?"

"A mere scratch, as I had the honour of informing you before; the ball has miraculously glanced off."

"Thank Heaven! I have the honour to salute you."

Skittles and Valentine returned to Paris as they had come, at a quick pace. The other party had their *calèche* in waiting, and in an hour's time all the clubs in Paris were talking about the duel between the Count de Laraquez and Trevelyan.

"Are you really not hurt?" said Valentine to her friend, who was pressing her hand against her side.

"I have a most confounded pain in my side; how hard that bullet must have hit me to be sure! It was jolly lucky I had the mail coat on, or it would have been all over with me."

"No doubt of it."

"Do you know, Valentine, I think loose women are more than half mad sometimes. What a mad thing it was for us to come out and fight Trevelyan

this morning! I am glad we are so well out of it."

"And I too. Will you go to some place and have breakfast when we have changed our things?"

"Yes; where shall we go?"

"Maison Dorée or the Chateau d'Argent."

"Very well, let's toss up when we get home."

The Count de Laraquez was in great trepidation and uncertainty all the morning; he did not know what to do, but at ten o'clock he ordered his carriage, and drove to the Circle Imperial to have a look at the papers. When he entered the club he became aware that he was the cynosure of all eyes. Everyone looked at him and whispered energetically, occasionally gesticulating a little violently, as is the manner and custom of Frenchmen. He tried to look unconcerned, but failed most miserably; at last some one came up to him, and said—

"Permit me to congratulate you."

"Upon what?"

"Your conquest over your principles."

"Pray what do you mean?"

"You ask me what I mean—oh! that is an excellent joke."

"Will you explain?"

"Explain to you?"

"Certainly, without you wish to drive me mad."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Don't be enigmatical any longer—what is it that you mean?"

"Your duel."

"My *what*?"

"The little *affaire d'honneur* you settled this morning before breakfast. I am delighted to see you, for there were all sorts of painful rumours about your being terribly wounded. Old Doctor Gunshot declared in my presence, that you left the ground with half an ounce of lead lodged under the fifth rib; he staked his reputation upon it; but here is Trevelyan."

"My dear count," exclaimed Trevelyan, who came forward with a smile upon his lips; "I beg to thank you for your generosity this morning, and I take this opportunity of thanking you publicly. It is moreover very gratifying to me to see that you are uninjured, though my friend Gunshot would have it that you were by this time three parts dead."

The Count de Laraquez looked first at one and then at the other in a vacant, purposeless way, then he put his finger in his mouth and bit it so as to see that he was not dreaming.

Trevelyan interpreted this nervousness into a fear that the affair might yet be bruited abroad, and so reach the ears of the police.

"Do not be afraid," he said, "we are amongst friends, and the authorities of the Hotel de Ville are not likely to hear anything about it."

"Friends?"

"Yes, give me your hand."

Laraquez suffered his hand to be taken and shaken heartily, and said--

"Ha, ha! It is well over, and we are of course

friendly again ; yes, quite so, exactly, of course, clearly."

He took the first opportunity of leaving the Circle Imperial and went somewhere else, but his messenger had gone before his face and trumpeted his fame abroad, so that every one he met spoke to him about his duel. He was the hero of the hour, but the affair to him was enveloped in the utmost mystery. He could not understand ; and that afternoon left Paris in despair, and went he cared not whither, finding himself before night at Amiens, where he stopped for a few days before joining his uncle at Rouen. One thing was clear, and that was, his honour was safe, and his reputation in Paris more firmly established than ever.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR COTTON SANDERS.

ON leaving the Chateau d'Argent, Skittles said—

“Let us go back to my hotel ; I want to see what that thundering beast Laraquez is doing. I have saved his honour, and I think he ought to give me some substantial proof of his gratitude ; what do you say ?”

“He is deeply in your debt,” replied Valentine.

They went to the Hotel B——, but without hearing anything of Laraquez ; the porter informed them that he had gone out early and had not yet returned. Ordering something to drink, Skittles and her friend sat down for a brief space until they could make up their minds what to do next.

A servant entered, and said—

“A gentleman to see madame.”

“Ask for his card.”

“It is here,” replied the servant, handing the delicate piece of pasteboard to her ; the card was able to boast of gilt edges.

“Trevelyan !” said Skittles, as her face flushed
“show him in.”

"Who is it?" inquired Valentine St. Roche; "shall I go?"

"No, stay where you are; it is Trevelyan, the man I fought with this morning—he is the best chaff out. You will like Trevelyan; as the old lady in Disraeli's novel says, 'he will taste you.'"

Trevelyan walked in, sprightly as usual, and in the best possible humour, wearing a gracious smile upon his face, and looking the picture of contentment and placid amiability.

"Good morning!" said Trevelyan, "I have come to thank you."

"For what?"

"The little innocent amusement you gave me this morning."

"I?" said Skittles, wondering how he could have divined what she considered a well-kept secret.

"Well, perhaps I am wrong in being so very personal. If I have not to thank you directly for the small amount of powder-burning which has given me more than my average amount of *verve*, I have to do so indirectly, for I am positive that Laraquez would never have come to the scratch had you not spurred him on."

"Oh, *now* I see what you mean," said Skittles, "but really you know I ought not to speak to you after you trying to kill my husband."

"He is a finer fellow than I gave him credit for."

"Is he?"

"That he is indeed; I never had much opinion of the man before to-day, but he has quite redeemed himself in my estimation."

"Quite?"

"Yes; I always thought he was by way of being a great nincompoop, but I am ready to confess that he has more in him than he generally allows people to see."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, not an hour ago."

"Was he friendly?"

"Very."

"What did he say?" asked Skittles, hardly able to restrain her curiosity.

"Well, he appeared to me to be slightly confused."

"So I should think."

"I put it down to innate modesty."

"That is a quality I never heard him accused of possessing before," said she, with a laugh.

"By the way, I shall take it as an especial favour if you will tell me who his second was."

"Whose second? Laraquez's?"

"Yes."

"A Mr. St. Roche."

"Yes, I know that, but who is he? I have been asking all the fellows I know, and not one is acquainted with a Mr. St. Roche. There is no gentleman of that name moving in good society in Paris just at this moment."

"Oh, indeed! I do not know the man. In point of fact I have only seen him once, and that was in the Champ de Mars, just before you come to the Ecole Militaire. I think he is a student there, and a distant relation of Laraquez's."

"Oh, thanks! perhaps that is the elucidation of the mystery. Rollingford said he was rather a stick, and did not seem to know much about the way to arrange a duel."

Skittles began to laugh, and so did Valentine.

"What are you laughing at?" inquired Trevelyan.

"You would join us if you knew."

"I wish you would tell me. We are old friends, and I have a right to your confidence."

"Oh, no! I don't admit that for a moment; but suppose I tell you?"

"Well?"

"What will you do?"

"I will go to Marquez's and get you the handsomest bracelet in Paris."

"You promise?"

"Most certainly."

"Come nearer to me."

He approached.

"Sit down on a chair."

He did so.

"I am laughing," she said, "to think that I have deceived you so well."

"How deceived me?"

"About the duel."

"Ah!"

"Laraquez did not fight."

"Not fight?"

"Mind, what I now say to you must go no farther."

"Oh, I did not say that."

"You must or I am dumb."

He hesitated.

"Do you promise?"

"What?"

"That you will not repeat a single word I say."

"Do you wish it?"

"I do; and more than that, I insist upon it."

"Since you put such a pressure upon me I have nothing to do but obey."

"You promise?"

"I do."

"Very well, upon that condition I go on with my story. Laraquez would not meet you."

"But—pardon me—he did meet me this morning; whatever he may have told you must go for nothing, because he was with me and we exchanged shots."

"You exchanged shots with some one, but not with Laraquez."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I was the person with whom you fought."

"*You?*"

"Yes."

"Oh, no! you cannot expect me to believe that, can you?"

"I do, because it is true."

"Well, much as I respect you, I reply that I cannot do so unless you give me some corroborative proof of your assertion."

"Oh, what an unbelieving Jew you are!" said Skittles, with a weary sigh.

"Give me some proof," repeated Trevelyan.

"I will try to do so; but first of all permit me to introduce you to M. St. Roche."

She turned towards Valentine with a mock bow.

"Ha, ha! I see you are making fun of me."

"I! Not I, indeed. I was never so much in earnest since I was born. Now, look here, Trevelyan, I'll tell you what we will do—the things we used in our get-up have not gone back to the *costumiers* yet, so we will all go to Valentine St. Roche's place, and you shall see them."

"Very well; I shall be glad to do so," replied Trevelyan.

He knew not what to think, and in fact he felt very uncomfortable, for if it were known that he went out with a woman, and that woman of all others Skittles, he would be the laughing-stock of Paris, and so would the Marquis of Rollingford.

They drove to Valentine's house, and Skittles said, with a charming smile—

"You are an old friend, Trevelyan, so you may come into our bedroom—Valentine will not mind."

"Oh, no; not one bit," said Valentine.

Trevelyan tried to look highly honoured at the extraordinary privilege which had been granted him, and succeeded beyond his expectations. In the bedroom belonging to Valentine St. Roche, the false hair, the cloaks, hats, the—what shall we say—the *culottes*, and the chain-armour, or steel shirt.

"There," exclaimed Skittles; "look at our wardrobe. What do you think now? Take up that chain thing, and see where your bullet hit me."

Trevelyan took up the shirt of mail and examined

it closely. Some of its rings were slightly indented, and grazed.

"Do you believe?"

"If I could see a corresponding mark on your side, I would believe most fully."

Skittles hesitated a moment, and then said—

"Well, I won't let my natural modesty stand in the way of your conversion. Come here, old fellow."

Trevelyan approached and stood by her side.

"Undo the body of my dress," she said.

He tried to do so, but was rather long over his task.

"Oh, what a fumbler you are! Here, Valentine, come and see what you can do."

Valentine soon undid the dress.

"You make a stunning *femme de chambre*," said Skittles.

"Do I?"

"Yes. Now unfasten my stays."

When this was satisfactorily accomplished, she exclaimed, pulling up the hem of that sacred and immaculate garment known as a *chemise*—

"Look; I don't think there is a wound, but there must be a lump, for it is so painful."

Trevelyan bent down, and looked at the white skin, which in that particular spot was very much swollen and discoloured.

"Is there much of a place?"

"Yes; you were hard hit."

"So I thought at the time," she replied; "it knocked me over."

Skittles began to dress herself again, and Trevelyan assisted her to the best of his ability, saying—

“I am perfectly astounded; but even now I do not quite understand the matter; it is like a crude text—sadly in want of copious explanatory notes.”

“Shall I try and explain it for you?”

“Of course it is to you that I look for an explanation.”

“Well, it lies in a nut-shell. Laraquez wouldn’t fight; all I could do wouldn’t make him go out; so all that remained for me to do was to fight you myself, and save his honour, for I wouldn’t have it said that I lived with a man who was a coward, and couldn’t take his own part when it was absolutely necessary. I couldn’t have stood that. You must forgive me for wearing that chain apparatus, I know it is not the proper thing to do, but I am only a woman, and I have heard you say that you are a crack shot. I wasn’t tired of my life though I did meet you.”

“I give you credit for your contrivance, and I compliment you upon your pluck, which is really something wonderful,” said Trevelyan.

“There was nothing very wonderful about it, when you consider what I am and what I have been all my life; I have more courage and cheek than ten dozen ordinary women all bowled into one.”

“Suppose, though, I had fired high, and my bullet had gone through your head? What then? Or suppose I had shattered your wrist?”

"Oh, don't talk about it!" said Valentine, shrinking back in alarm at the terrible picture Trevelyan's vivid imagination allowed him to draw.

"If it had killed me," said Skittles, in a tone of unconcern, "I don't imagine I should have cared much when I was in my grave; and if you had broken my wrist, why I should have had to get some one else to write my letters, or keep a secretary, which, as I don't write remarkably well, would be rather an improvement upon the present state of things than otherwise."

"You are a wonder; I never met anybody like you."

"No, and you're not likely to again. I don't care for anything, and I don't care for anybody, and I've got an account at the London and Westminster Bank, and my drafts are honoured by the Continental Bank on the Boulevard des Capucines."

"Bravo! What can be more indicative of *insouciance*?" said Trevelyan. "Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"*Vive la bagatelle!*" cried Valentine St. Roche.

"I vote we go somewhere," said Skittles.

"Shall I get a box at the opera?"

"No; I am tired of everything swell. I want to dive beneath the surface."

"What do you say to a *café chantant*, then?"

"Where?"

"In the Palais Royal."

"That is too aristocratic."

"I will tell you where you shall go!" exclaimed Valentine.

"Where?"

"To the Groves of the Evangelists."

"Where is that?"

"In a low part of Paris. I will take you. I once go there with Reginald Carleton. It is great fun. It is a long street with houses of bad fame—*maisons de passe*; but the women are ver low, ver low indeed. They are *Grivoises* for the most part—low soldiers' women. There is a music-hall in the Groves of the Evangelists. Is it not a funny name? I always laugh when I think of it. The Evangelists do not hear themselves spoken of very often. All the women sit at their windows, and laugh at and talk to people going by; and they have high dresses coming up to their chins, and they let them down almost to their waists when anyone comes past the window, and pull them up again almost directly."

"I should like to go," said Skittles. "What do you say, Trevelyan?"

"Whatever is agreeable to you is so to me," he replied, politely; "and if you, my little duellist, my accomplished powder-burner, say, 'Go to the Groves of the Evangelists,' I agree in an instant."

"Just you take care that I don't burn powder to some purpose next time I begin with you," said Skittles, with a laugh.

"We shall have a capital *nuitée*," said Valentine.

"What's that? When you begin to jaw and talk idioms, I can't follow you. Trevelyan."

"Yes."

"You are a swell! What's *nuitée*?"

"It means a night's work, I believe."

"Yes, yes, that is it!" cried Valentine, nodding her head, violently.

"We will have some dinner first."

"Yes, an early dinner," said Trevelyan.

"When we get there," continued Valentine St. Roche, "we must do what you say—be the hypocrite. You know what this means—*faire la sainte nitouche*—dress badly, and pretend we are low women, too."

"I suppose there are plenty of fights in the Groves of the Evangelists?" inquired Trevelyan.

"Oh, yes! the French soldiers fight."

"I don't care for them; they are nothing better than a lot of undersized 'barnchutes,' as we say in India."

"Have you been in India?" said Skittles.

"Where haven't I been?"

"That is not an answer. Have you been?"

"Yes; and killed a Bengal tiger in Singapore."

"How could it be a Bengal tiger if it was in Singapore?"

"It swam over from the main land, and I had the extreme pleasure and satisfaction of potting it. I am teaching you natural history for nothing. We call niggers Barnchutes and Markachutes."

"What does it mean?" inquired Skittles, innocently.

"Ah, that I don't know. I must refer you to a Hindustance dictionary."

"Tell me on the quiet."

"I would with pleasure, but I don't understand native slang. By the way, is it true you are going to get married?"

"To whom?"

"Report don't say."

"Then report ought to."

"The story is going about."

"Pity men haven't something better to talk about."

"Is it true?"

"No; when I get married it will be at St. Mary's."

"In London?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts?"

"Axe," said Skittles, with a laugh.

"St. Mary Axe, eh! that's not at all bad," said Trevelyan, biting his lip.

"You admit you were sold?"

"I admit nothing; I'll only say I'm sorry I spoke."

"If you and Mr. Trevelyan go together," said Valentine, with true French instinct, "I shall be alone, which will never do for me. I must have my *amant* as well as you. Shall I write to some one to come to my house?"

"No; I think not. Permit me a moment," said Trevelyan. "I know a very nice fellow who is now staying at the Grand, and he will be charmed with an introduction—at present, he is dying of *ennui*. He is awfully rich, and an English baronet. The only drawback about him is his

stupidity, or his affected stupidity; for he never seems to know the name of anything, or to understand anything—if you speak to him of politics, he will look vacantly at you, and ask you what you mean.”

“What is his name?”

“Sir Cotton Sanders.”

“Is he rich and a fool?” said Skittles.

“Yes.”

“How comes it, then, that he has not been picked up by somebody?”

“He is my friend,” replied Trevelyan, with dignity.

“That is as **much as** to say that you work him yourself.”

“Not at all.”

“Oh, I know you, my dear fellow, and I don’t believe you would object at all, if you had the chance. You and I have met before to-day.”

“Yes,” said Trevelyan, with a sardonic grin, “at Liverpool, I believe.”

“Shut up about that.”

“One remark provokes another.”

“With me, a remark I don’t like provokes something else.”

“What is that?—a game of skittles?”

“No—a punch on the head, which you will get directly, if you don’t hold your tongue! I’m not particular about who I slip into.”

“You never were very particular.”

“Oh, I don’t know—I can fight anybody!”

"Shall we go to the Grand Hotel and see Sir Cotton?"

"No; bring him here. Do you think I am going trapezing about after a half-and-half baronet?"

"Oh! all right. I'll fetch him. I really didn't know; I thought you would like to go out."

"Did you? Then you find you were mistaken."

"'Pon my word you are so impetuous!"

"That shows that I have a special talent for my vocation—at least, you once told me so," said Skittles.

"You ought to be grateful to me for my tutelage."

"I ought to, perhaps, but I'm not."

"Shall we stop quarrelling, and be amicable by way of a change?"

"All right; anything for a quiet life. Run along to the Grand Hotel, and bring back your *non compos* baronet."

"He's not so bad as that. He's not *non compos*."

"Has he got a keeper?"

"Only when I'm with him."

"Good Lord, deliver him!"

"Are you in the habit of quoting from the Litany?"

"Yes, when I'm in the Rue D'Aguessau."

"This is the Quartier Brèda."

"Never mind what quarter it is; if it is the most seedy in Paris, it is too good for you."

"After that, I shall go."

"The sooner the better."

"Don't be cruel."

"If you had gone when I told you, you would have been there and back again by this time."

"I'm off."

This declaration was matter of fact, for Trevelyan took his departure at once, saying, by way of a parting shot—

"Perhaps Cotton Sanders will give me something to drink, which is more than you have offered to do."

Skittles seized something, and threw it after his retreating figure. The missile did not take effect and he made his escape into the street. He drove to the Grand Hotel, and inquired at the *caisse* for Sir Cotton Sanders, was informed that he was disengaged, and to be found in room 190, to which he immediately ascended. The great chaff amongst Cotton's friends was to call him the commercial wad, or the Manchester idol, but on this occasion Trevelyan refrained from making use of those familiar and slightly frivolous terms.

"How are you, Sanders?" he cried. "Slightly hipped I see."

"Just a little. I feel rather—rather—you know what I mean—rather—where the devil's the book with the words in it! What do you call it?" said Sir Cotton Sanders, with a feminine drawl, which is too unpleasant to be literally placed upon paper.

"The dictionary," suggested Trevelyan.

"That's it; fellow called Johnson wrote it, didn't he, at the same time that he invented the English—English—what d'ye call——"

"Language."

"Yes, language ; bad memory I've got, wish I'd better memory."

"Sorry I can't assist you to one."

"Now you're joking."

"No, 'pon my word, never joke."

"I wish I had something to do ; I'd go into th' army, if 't wasn't such a bore."

"You want some woman to liven you up—want a wife in fact," said Trevelyan.

"Yes, I do. If some woman—decent-looking woman of course—would come to me and ask me to have her, I'd snap at the chance, and make her Lady—Lady—deuce take it, I've forgotten my own name now !"

"Sanders."

"That's it, sir. Godfathers and godmothers gave it me at the font."

"I'll introduce you to a jolly woman."

"A lady?"

"*A la main gauche.*"

"A lorette, eh ? a left-hander?"

"Yes."

"I'm sick of 'em ; they only suck up to you because they want your money."

"This one is one of the best in Paris, and has lots of tin of her own."

"Sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I thought you would like to come out with us."

"Us?"

"Yes, Skittles and myself."

"Skittles," repeated Sir Cotton Sanders; "is Skittles to be one of your party? I would give worlds to be introduced to her. I have heard she was in—in—what the devil's the name of the place?"

"Paris."

"Yes, that's it. I wish to Heaven my wits wouldn't go wool-gathering."

"I can give you an introduction at once if you like."

"Capital. I'm your man; where is she?"

"Close by."

"At her own house?"

"No, at a friend's."

"Where are you going?"

"To the Groves of the Evangelists."

"Where is that?"

"Some low part of Paris. We go for the fun of the thing."

"Famous; just what I want. It has been my wish for ever so long to see a little life, and I embrace this opportunity with—with—what d'ye call it, when you eat a thing and like it?"

"Pleasure."

"Yes, to be sure. I say."

"What?"

"You don't think that she'll take me for a fool, do you?"

"Not for a moment."

"I shouldn't wonder if she did, but when she comes to know me——"

"Ah! when she comes to know you the case will be altogether different."

"Of course, because *you* know, Trevelyan, that I'm not *really* a fool. It's only my manner."

"I always said so. There is not a shrewder man than yourself out of Earlswood—I—I mean London."

"That's the truth, but it is so difficult to get a fellow to believe in one. I wish I could write a book; people believe in Carlyle and John Stuart Mill because they have written books."

"Are you ready?"

"Shall I dress?"

"Oh no, you will do well enough."

Sir Cotton Sanders put on his hat and was ready to accompany his friend. The carriage which had brought Trevelyan to the Grand took them back to Valentine St. Roche's, at which place they found a delicious little repast awaiting them. Valentine never took the trouble to keep cooks and scullery-maids on the premises, she invariably had everything she required sent in from a confectioner's shop in the neighbourhood. This was an expensive mode of living, but what gay lady that ever lived cared about expense? Money, in the estimation of *lorettes*, was made for the express purpose of going, and they are never so happy as when they are spending it. They seem to think that it is wrong to keep money made in the way in which they make it. It blisters their fingers, and burns a hole in their pockets, therefore they get rid of it as soon as possible. Certainly a *lorette* flourishing upon an ill-gotten banking ac-

count is not the most moral or edifying spectacle in the world.

Valentine made great love to Sir Cotton Sanders he was a good-looking fellow although a noodle, and women are sometimes charmed with handsome nonentities. He was pleased with her attentions, and made himself as agreeable as his sluggish nature would permit him.

"Will you like to come with us in the evening?" said Valentine.

"Oh! yes, shall be very much charmed to do so," replied the baronet, "if such a dear creature as yourself is to be of the party."

"Ah! Sir Sanders, you me flatter."

"Flatter, not I. 'Pon honour I protest. I like seeing—seeing—what's that we leave when we die?"

"Life," suggested Trevelyan.

"Ah! yes, life."

"What an ass he is!" whispered Skittles to Trevelyan.

"Yes, but he's awfully rich."

"Does he play *écarté*?"

"D—— badly."

"So much the better. It is a game at which I am a swell."

"That is too bad. I start the game——"

"And I follow it up," she said, with a smile.

After lunch came coffee, and after coffee *liqueurs*, and then the party disposed themselves for a little quiet amusement and conversation.

"What time is the best for going to the Groves

of the Evangelists?" inquired Trevelyan of Valentine.

"Oh ' nine or ten o'clock ; not before."

"It is now three—what are we to do in the meanwhile?"

"We must go somewhere and dine at about six."

"Ah ! but from three to six ?"

"Oh ! stay here and play."

"At what ?"

"*Le jeu vert*," said Skittles.

This was a slang name for any game by means of which a victim is to be plundered.

Skittles and Trevelyan it was arranged were to play Valentine and Sir Cotton Sanders. Cards were produced, and the corks flew from several bottles of sparkling wine. The game lasted an hour and a half, and at the end of that time Skittles and Trevelyan had each won ten thousand francs ; of course, Sanders could not think of allowing Valentine to pay her own debts, and he had the pleasure of writing two cheques for five hundred pounds each, one of which he handed to Trevelyan, the other to Skittles, saying—

"Here is your—your—what's that thing we buy bread and cheese with?"

"Money."

"Ah ! to be sure. Funny it is, to be sure, I can't recollect things."

"You didn't play as well as you usually do, Sanders."

"Why, p'raps not. Fact is, my dear fellow, I had so charring a partner that I couldn't think of

the game ; you must give me my revenge some day or other."

It so happened that Valentine St. Roche and Trevelyan got into conversation, and Skittles beckoned the Baron to her side ; as he approached she pulled up the skirts of her dress, and made way for him on the sofa upon which she was sitting, and when he had sat down, she released her crinoline, which flooded his knees, and rendered the lower part of his body invisible.

"Why have you not spoken to me yet, Sir Cotton Sanders?" exclaimed *la Belle* Laraquez, with one of her most winning smiles.

"I—I—'pon my word, I hardly dared."

"Oh, nonsense ! I cannot be so very terrible as to make you afraid of me."

"I have been dying for an introduction ever since my arrival in Paris."

"Faint heart, Sir Cotton ; you know the rest."

"Oh ! that's all very well, but you know you are a European—a—a—what d'ye call Garibaldi ?"

"Celebrity."

"Yes, that's it. You must forgive my mannerism. Got such an atrocious memory, you know. I was going to say that you are a European celebrity, just as much as the Emperor of the French, or—or—the—what are those fellows that come from Japan ?"

"Japanese."

"Yes ; or the Japanese ambassador ; but, I say——"

"What ?"

"Don't think me rude."

"Oh, no!—your simplicity is so delightful that I could not think you rude under any circumstances. What is it you wish to say?"

"Why, look here; are you really the great Skittles?"

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"I suppose so. I am not aware that my individuality has undergone a change."

"I have often heard of you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; you know fellows will talk after dinner, and lots of times the conversation has turned upon you."

"I feel quite complimented to think I could be made the subject of an after-dinner conversation; and what do men say of me, Sir Cotton?"

"Well, you know, if I must be candid, and speak the truth——"

"By all means do so."

"Well, then, they run you down."

"Oh, that is too unkind."

"I thought so too, because they are men who have never spoken to you in their lives."

"That is the reason perhaps," she said, with a smile more prolonged and sweeter than the first.

"I'm sure of one thing."

"It is folly to be sure of anything in this uncertain world."

"So it is."

"I have interrupted you; pray forgive me."

"With pleasure," said Sir Cotton Sanders.

"What are you sure of?"

"Just this, that no one who is acquainted with you could possibly dislike you."

"Cannot you say more than that? I don't like half-and-half compliments."

"Well; I don't know you very well, and I'm a little shy; you must not be hard upon me."

"Are you overwhelmed at sitting on the same sofa with the great Skittles?"

"I suppose that must be it."

"How can I put you at your ease?"

"You are extremely affable and condescending now."

"Shall I give you my hand to squeeze, or would that make you nervous?"

"I—I am rather afraid it would," he replied, blushing.

Skittles was suffocating with laughter, and had great difficulty in restraining her mirth.

After a pause, Sir Cotton Sanders continued—

"If I were to give you my candid opinion, I—I should say you were very—very——what do they call Venus?"

"Beautiful."

"That's it—very beautiful."

"I have heard that before, so I am inclined to believe it; but tell me what men say about me. Do they say I drink?—people always say that, it is the first thing that the breath of calumny stoops to."

"Oh, yes! I heard one man at the Jockey Club

say one night that you thought nothing of drinking two bottles of brandy a day."

"Two a day! Why I must be made of cast iron to stand it."

"Of course; but then they said it couldn't last."

"No, I should think not."

"And then they say you swear like a trooper."

"Have you heard me?"

"No, I have not."

"I have no doubt you believed them."

"No, not exactly; I didn't know what to think. They also added that your remarks were very coarse, and that you were nothing to look at."

"If that is the case, I wonder what men see in me. You have drawn quite a repulsive picture."

"People say it's your cheek."

"My cheek! but I am not impudent. Come, Sir Cotton, do me the justice to admit that I am the reverse of forward."

"You are at once mild, gentle, and fascinating, and I think it is most odious that you should be abused by a parcel of fellows who would be glad to know you. I declare I will call the next fellow out; I will, indeed—I'll call him out, by G—!"

"No, no; you must not do that—I would not have you run any risk for my sake."

"Really, I do not know about love at first—what is it?—but I feel as if I could die for you, or cut off my little finger if you told me to."

"Oh! that is stupid; you must not be such a goose as to talk like that. You may love me very much in time, but I should never ask you to muti-

late yourself in that way. I have been looking all my life for some dear, nice fellow to make a pet and a darling of me. Most men seem to think that I am very good to chaff with and ride across country, and all that sort of thing. I have never yet met a man who is kind and gentle and able to read my heart and appreciate me."

"I can sympathize with you—I can indeed," said Sir Cotton Sanders; "perhaps you will permit me——"

"Ah! *ma chère!* What long chat you have together," exclaimed Valentine St. Roche.

"Confound the woman!" muttered Skittles; "*she* has come just when I didn't want her."

CHAPTER X.

THE GROVES OF THE EVANGELISTS.

THE thoroughfare which was known by the fantastic title of the Groves of the Evangelists was, as Valentine St. Roche had said, situated in a very low part of Paris, and one which it behoved all decently-dressed people who carried valuable property about their persons to beware of. The houses in it were all, without one exception, of bad character. Women of no reputation whatever, except for evil, would sit at the windows and entice and solicit those of the artizan and military classes who happened to go by; but the great attraction of the Groves of the Evangelists was its music hall. Every one who wished to see all phases of life in Paris made a point of going to this music hall, which was notorious for its noisy vocalization, and its freely rendered and as freely worded songs. The performance took place in a large room attached to a *cabaret*, called the "Dernier Sou." This public-house belonged to a little weazened, old-fashioned looking man of the name of Grimaud. Possibly this was a nickname given him owing to his diminutive and puerile appearance. Grimaud had a

very bad face. If there is any truth in physiognomy, Grimaud was a terrible scoundrel. There was villain and rogue and thief, ay, and murderer written as plainly on his countenance as if the hand of man had traced the infamous words with a pencil or a brush.

As long as Grimaud thought he could make anything out of a customer he was civility itself, and smiled in the blindest manner; but when the money was gone---when it had changed pockets, that is gone from the pocket of the customer into his own—he changed his obsequiousness for a harsh and peremptory demeanour.

The police knew a great deal about Grimaud, but not one single member of that exemplary force had a good word to say for him. In days gone by Grimaud had been married—his wife only lived three years, and then died in childbirth. The infant survived, but the father never took kindly to it. People said that the loss of his wife, to whom he was much attached, preyed upon Grimaud's mind, and made him what he was; but there were others again who had known Grimaud before his marriage, and they freely and roundly asserted that he always was an unconscionable scoundrel, and that the untimely decease of his wife did not make him a bit worse than he had been before.

The name of the little girl who survived her unhappy mother was Blulette; a good name, too, for there was something sparkling and vivacious about her manner, which took a man's fancy in a moment. Blulette was a very nice girl, but it is sad to relate that she was no better than she should be. Her

father's ill-treatment, and the seductive neighbours by whom she was surrounded, had driven her to dissipation as a way of flying from her misery. Bluetie generally stood behind the old-fashioned bar, and served the casual customers and made herself generally useful. Her father gave her no salary, nothing in the shape of wages—not even a new franc on New Year's day, but yet she was always very well dressed. She invariably wore silk dresses when she went out, and earrings of a very pretty pattern dangled from her ears. How did Bluetie do all this? Grimaud—Maitre Grimaud as he was called—did not take the trouble to find out. His daughter dressed, and dressed well too, and it did not cost him a penny—that was all he cared.

There was yet another inmate of the "Last Half-penny," and that was Bichesse, a very old woman, a toothless old hag, a desperately wicked old wretch, for whose reception hell was yawning, a monstrous old woman, Grimaud's familiar. Deep was she in his confidence, knowing all about his affairs, and having his soul in her keeping. Bluetie hated her, and called her *Bisaïeule*; at which she grew furious, and bared her old toothless gums in denunciation.

With these three people the little party starting from Valentine St. Roche's house was destined to come in communication. First of all, they went to the music hall, and saw *Les Clowns Anglais* and heard a few songs, which were thoroughly French in their conception and execution. Saw also what in America would be called a free fight between two angelic beings, who struck out straight from

the shoulder like a man, and made the blood flow in right royal prize-ring fashion. At length the police interfered, and they were carted off to the nearest Bridewell, there to cool their courage and sleep off their potations, next day to be committed, without the option of a fine, for the offence of breaking the Emperor's peace.

After watching all this for the space of an hour, "The" Laraquez moved the adjournment of the house in the following fashion :—

"I vote we go and get something to drink."

"By all means," replied Trevelyan.

"Where shall we find anything?"

"Precisely what I was going to ask."

"Come, now, you are an enterprising man; go and find out some *marchand de vins*, and come back and fetch us."

"Very well. Give me a quarter of an hour and I'll spy out the land for you. Will you wait?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour; you can't expect it."

Trevelyan nodded, and went away. On leaving the music hall, or *café chantant*, he saw Grimaud's sign inviting him to enter the "Last Halfpenny," which he did in an unsuspecting manner. Standing at the bar was an American—a regular thorough-going down-east Yankee—and two Frenchmen, his friends. They did not appear to understand his lingo very well, but whenever he spoke they looked up and laughed, and nodded their heads in admiring appreciation of his superior talent, which they were not above acknowledging.

"Come along, my gay and festive cusses," he exclaimed as Trevelyan entered the place; "we'll have another glass of this rot-gut stuff, and then we'll skedaddle."

"Like the Yankees at Bull Run," Trevelyan ventured to observe.

"What d'ye know about Bull Run, or Cow Run, or any other run, yer bloated Britisher?" cried the Yankee. "I'm a Yank, and I've only to speak to yer of Bunker. We beat yer ter Bunker, yer know, and you'll put yer tarnation head within your legs and cry whipped. Bunker was tew steep a hill for yer tew climb, I guess; but bust me to ribbons we won't quarrel yet awhile; I want to get as screwy as a new boat to-night, and I never fight a Britisher till I've drunk myself blind and can't see."

"Perhaps that will polish up your powers of vision," said Trevelyan, quietly letting out his right hand and knocking the American on the floor, making him change a perpendicular for a horizontal position.

The Yankee pulled himself up, shook himself together, pulled up his shirt-collar, drew his hand over his face, and coolly drinking up his brandy-and-water, delivered himself of the following speech:—

"Look here, boss, I calc'late this ere sort of going on aint Yorkshire. You've give me a domino on my peeper, and I guess it's a chalk to you. I wasn't doing you no harm, and it takes a deal to rouse the 'Merican Eagle; but, Lord Jesus, when he is riz it's a caution! I've got a feather of the

bird in my cocoa-nut, and when the wind begins to blow the chimney's bound to smoke; and then, so help yer Saul and Jonathan, it's a case with every salamandering 'coon in creation. Fact, stranger. Now look here, boss, I comed out to-night with two of my own particklar hosses, and we meant to go Sambo. We walked about a tidy lot till we came to a theyater—leastways I knew it was a theyater by the almighty sight o' gas there was a flarin' and a blazin' outside; and there was a gal—oh, she was a gal, quite scrumptious—and she was a dancin' and a goin' on anyhow; and I says, says I, 'Go it, my dear, there's nothing like leather;' and at that a b—— tall chap, he comes up to me, and says he, 'This ere wont do, you're bound to go out,' and then I guess I made tracks, and found myself down here. If so be as you hit me again I'll go in a smasher, and gouge your eye into your boot, and no mistake, as I mean to do as I damn please, so mind your daylights."

Trevelyan listened very patiently to this harangue, and then with the same precision as before he knocked him down a second time.

Everyone fully expected there would be a fight this time, but the Yankee got up with great placidity, wiped the blood from his nose with the back of his hand, and said—

"I guess, stranger, if you wasn't an old friend there'd be murder."

"Old friend! I never saw you before," said Trevelyan.

"Oh, come, God torgive you for lyin'! Why,

when you was at cobbling-work at New York, didn't you mend a pair of shoes for me, and didn't you charge me five cents too much, and didn't I kick you straight into the street, then and there?"

"Certainly not."

"Don't you go and deny it, boss, 'cos you can't. Well, look'ee heyar, I kicked you then and I wont do it again; you're so damn soft, I might go slick through you; so consider yourself kicked a second time, and now let's liquor. Come on, my gay and festive cusses, let's liquor."

Trevelyan paid for some brandy-and-water, and was about to go away, when Grimaud sent Bluette to say that there was a private room on the ground floor, at the back of the house, if the gentleman would like to patronize it. Grimaud had noticed that Trevelyan was well dressed, and a superb watch-chain hanging over a waistcoat had arrested the critical attention of Mons. Grimaud, the Jew, the thief, the avaricious, the wretch.

"Ha!" said Trevelyan, as Bluette approached him; "a pretty girl, upon my word. I think I nave time to say a word to her."

Trevelyan was a great admirer of the raw material; he did not care so much about a woman polished as he did for a woman in the rough. Innocence was his delight, rusticity was his delight, and so was suburban virginity. If, however, he had visited the Groves of the Evangelists in the hope of finding either innocence or virginity in the male or female population he was destined to be sadly disappointed. P'actte—pretty, soft-eyed

Bluette—with her red and rosy lips, her light wavy hair, her *retroussé* nose—or as we once heard it called in London, her “*nez retroussé* nose,” but when we looked at the person who had been guilty of the error we forgave the pleonasm—her dimpled chin and her rosy cheeks, which were not altogether innocent of brickdust, Bluette was calculated to draw a man into conversation, and cause him to listen when he ought to have been minding his business.

“What is your name, my little woman?” said Trevelyan, in French.

“Bluette, sir,” she replied.

“Are you Grimaud’s daughter?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How many sweethearts have you?”

“Oh, not one,” said Bluette, laughing.

“Not one?”

“No, sir.”

“It is time you had a dozen; you are pretty. How is it you have no sweetheart? Are the men about here insensible to female beauty?”

“I suppose so,” replied Bluette, looking down and blushing.

Trevelyan bent down, caught her in his arms, and kissed her three or four times.

“Oh, oh!” cried Bluette.

Trevelyan slipped some silver into her hand, and said—

“To buy *bon-bons* with.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“What for, the kiss or the money?”

“Both,” she replied, with an impudent look.

"Will you come and see the room?" she added.

Almost immediately she supplemented her remark with—

"But stay."

"What do you say?" demanded Trevelyan.

The girl was about to speak when Mons. Grimaud came out of the bar, and exclaimed, in severe accents—

"Now, Bluette, Bluette, Bluette, what are you doing there? Don't keep the gentleman hanging about in the passage, show him the room; gentlemen don't like to be kept waiting, Bluette. Make haste, my girl—make haste."

The sound of his voice acted like a spur upon Bluette, for she smothered the remarks she had upon her tongue, and quickening her movements led the way into the room, which in English parlance corresponded to a parlour. Grimaud muttered something and went back to the bar. The room into which Bluette, all pale and trembling, ushered Trevelyan was plainly but comfortably furnished; the centre of the room was open, the chairs and tables being placed in the four corners. Trevelyan entered at Bluette's request, but as she spoke he fancied her voice was thick and husky, and wondered what might be the cause of her emotion.

"Stand here, sir," said Bluette, in the same timid, half-suffocated voice, pointing as she spoke to the centre of the room.

"Why should I stand there?"

"Because you will get a better view."

"Of you?"

"No, sir, of the room."

"That is hardly worth the trouble."

Nevertheless he moved and stood in the middle of the room ; hardly had he done so before Blurette touched a little hand-bell which stood on a table. It was difficult to say whether or not she did it by accident or design, probably the latter, for directly afterwards the flooring upon which Trevelyan was standing gave way, precipitating him into the depths below. He uttered a stifled cry ; the boards rose up and resumed their normal position. Blurette ran from the room shuddering, putting her hands to her eyes as if to keep out some dreadful sight. Grimaud's hoarse laughter could be heard in the bar—the tinkling of the bell was a signal, and Trevelyan had been caught in a trap.

CHAPTER XL

BARROSSEZ.

WHEN a quarter of an hour elapsed without Trevelyan's return, Skittles began to get annoyed ; she did not feel in the least degree anxious about him, neither did she wonder what had become of him. Her surmise was that he had met some pretty girl to whom he was talking, and she felt considerably annoyed that he should so slight her as to talk to a good-looking *grisette*.

"Trevelyan's a jolly long time," she said, addressing Sir Cotton Sanders.

"Yes, he is taking it easy. I suppose he finds it difficult to discover a decent sort of—of—what are those places where one goes in to get a drain of anything, and where common people get drunk?"

"Do you mean a *cabaret*?"

"That's it, a *cabaret*. Perhaps he can't find one."

"I saw lots coming along ; I should not think that would take him very long. I expect, if the truth were known, he has found out some *grisette* whom he is spooning over and making an appointment with. It is just like him ; he is quite publi

spirited. I wish one thing though, and that is he would have better taste than to keep us waiting."

"Shall I go after him?" said Sir Cotton Sanders.

"No, no! for goodness sake don't you go, or we shall be left by ourselves," said Valentine St. Roche.

"Well, suppose we are," said "The" Laraquez; "it won't kill us; the people here can't eat us up."

"But there might be a row, and the women are such wretches."

"They are a thundering low lot, if that is what you mean, but low as they are I am not afraid of them. I believe I could fight the whole lot of them single-handed; I never was afraid of Dolly-mops."

"What do you say to us all going in search of Trevelyan," exclaimed Sir Cotton Sanders, thinking that he had hit upon a brilliant idea.

"I don't think it would be quite safe," said Valentine.

"What then is the good of—of—I say, what is the name of those fellows who lock one up for being drunk and kicking up a shindy?"

"Do you mean the police?"

"To be sure. What's the good of the police, if we are not to be protected?"

"I don't think the police are worth much anywhere," said Skittles; "it is the fashion to chaff them in England, and I think they deserve all the ridicule they get."

As she spoke a badly-dressed man approached them, and stood close by without speaking. He

seemed to make it his especial province to watch and keep his eye upon them.

"I wonder who that ill-looking fellow is," said Skittles; "he seems to have taken an especial affection to myself."

"Is that something unusual?" said Sir Cotton Sanders.

"Is what unusual?"

"I mean is it unusual for anyone to be fond of you, or to be struck with you?"

"Why don't you express yourself more clearly?" replied Skittles. "Of course it isn't an unusual thing for men to be spooney on me, but I can't understand that low fellow's attention; I rather fancy he wants to pick my pocket."

"That isn't at all unlikely, but I say——"

"Well?"

"Are we going in search of that fellow Trevelyan or not?"

"Oh, yes! I had quite forgotten him. We had better be moving at once."

"I am ready."

"Oh, don't go, dear!" said Valentine St. Roche.

"Why not?"

"It may be dangerous."

"I don't care whether it is or not; I came out for a spree and I mean to have it," said Skittles, in that remarkable tone of determination which characterized most of her famous declarations.

The trio rose and left the music hall with a lofty air which set the *grivoises* in a roar. When they were fairly outside they looked about them in

order to ascertain if there was any place where they could refresh themselves, and in which Trevelyan could have taken shelter. While they were thus engaged the "Maison Grimaud" caught their eye, and Skittles said—

"There, do you see that shop? It looks a likely sort of a place. Suppose we turn in there and get something to wake us up a bit."

"All right," said Sir Cotton Sanders, "allow me to do the pioneer, and lead the way; it is a hazardous duty which I shall have the greatest pleasure in performing."

"If you mean what you say do it at once; be a little quicksilver."

"I will be a little Mercury to do your bidding," replied Sir Cotton Sanders, perpetrating a pun of a very low order, and of which he almost immediately felt thoroughly ashamed.

Just as they were about to move on in the direction of the tavern, the badly-dressed man, who had hitherto contented himself with passively watching the little party, approached Skittles and said—

"I beg your pardon, countess."

"He spoke very good English, though his accent was not so good as it might have been."

She stared rudely at him, and was passing on without making any remark or favouring him with an answer.

Sir Cotton Sanders did not notice the interruption—he was talking to Valentine. The fact was he found himself in a facetious mood, and he had just that moment felt an inspiration of genius which

prompted him to make a riddle. Now of all things farcical, conundrums, rebuses, and the like riddles, are the abomination of the feminine mind—they are so much trouble to guess, and they cause an infinity of vexation and annoyance. It is humiliating to think that you cannot guess the meaning of a few words jumbled dexterously together.

“I declare I have matle a—a—what do you call those things which drive you half-mad to guess?” exclaimed Sir Cotton Sanders.

“*Enigme*,” suggested Valentine.

“Yes, that’s it—an enigma, or what we call a riddle. It ain’t an easy one to understand, because it is half Latin and half English; and since Queen Elizabeth translated Sallust and Sophocles, I believe ladies have given up taking honours in Latin. But, look here, this is the—what d’ye call the riddle? Why is it unnecessary to reply to a question when there is a goose for dinner? Of course you can’t guess, so I’ll tell you. Because there’s an ‘anser’ on the table. Of course you don’t see the fun of it; I never expected you would until I told you that ‘anser’ is the Latin for goose.”

“And you are the creature itself!” retorted Valentine. “Are you not *méchant*?”

In the meantime a conversation of an interesting nature had taken place between the Laraquez and the ill-dressed *homunculus*, who had addressed her.

“I beg your pardon,” he continued, walking by her side, “but I must have a few words with you.”

"Must!"

"Yes; excuse my imperative way of speaking. I consult your safety alone."

"My safety!"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Barossez," replied the man, drawing himself up with dignity, as if conscious of having uttered a name calculated to awake respect, esteem, or wonderment in the breast of the listener.

"Barossez!" repeated Skittles, in an abstracted way; "I have heard the name before. Pray who and what are you?"

"The chief of the detective police of Paris."

As she heard this, her attention became concentrated. The chief of the detective police was a terrible personage in her eyes, and a man to be looked upon with fear and trembling, but although she could not help fearing him, she fortunately refrained from trembling.

"How am I to know that you are speaking the truth?—and what do you want with me?" she said.

"In reply to your first question," he answered, "I have only to mention a few circumstances which will prove that I am at least possessed of some little detective sagacity."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, *soi disant* Countess Laraquez——"

"*Soi disant!*" she repeated, angrily, "how dare you have the insolence——"

"You wanted proofs. Shall I be silent?"

"No; go on."

"You came to the Groves of the Evangelists with a friend."

"With more than one."

"You are right. Shall I repeat their names?"

"Do so."

"First, M. Trevelyan; second, Sir Cotton Sanders; third, Valentine St. Roche, *femme galante*."

"Again, impertinent!"

"Excuse me, I am only adhering to facts. You have lost your friend Trevelyan," said Barossez.

"Yes. Do you know where we can find him?"

"I do."

"Tell me that, Mr. Barossez, and I will believe in your detective sagacity."

"I will do more than that; I will tell you something which is of great moment to you. In half an hour you would have all been murdered."

"What?"

"Murdered—lying in pools of blood with your throats cut," said Barossez.

"Oh, that is nonsense!—that is simply impossible, and convinces me more than anything else that you are an impostor," said Skittles, with an incredulous smile.

"Stop a bit. Listen to me," said Barossez, with equanimity.

"Very well; only do not keep me out here all night. I am dying for something to drink. I don't believe in you, you know, old fellow; but I

don't mind hearing what you have to say, if you won't be too long over saying it."

"I will try and put faith in you. Look to your right," said Barossez.

She did so.

"What do you see?"

"A low sort of what we call public-house."

"Exactly. Were you not going to have your *petit verre* there?"

"Yes—that is true; for that is just the very crib we were thinking of turning into."

"That is Grimaud's."

"And who is Grimaud?"

"A wretch whom I have long been wishing to arrest. He has hitherto been too cunning for me, but I shall to-night, I hope, have an opportunity of caging one of the biggest rogues in Paris, and, with your permission, you shall be the decoy-duck."

"Oh, no! I am not a police spy. I do not play into the hands of the police."

"Will you not assist me when by so doing you will save the life of Trevelyan, your friend?"

"How do I know that it is in danger?"

"Such an objection is idle. Am I not Barossez, and have I not said so?"

"If you are Barossez, you are not everybody."

"Pray do not interrupt me!" he said, earnestly; "minutes are precious. M. Trevelyan is in danger of death. He went into the 'Last Halfpenny' and asked for a private room. He was watched by Grimaud, and talked to by Blulette."

"Who is Blulette?"

"She is an accomplice of Grimaud's, and a relation, though she acts under constraint rather than from inclination. Grimaud is the arch-fiend—the master of the hell-shaft, down which he precipitates his victims. Well, your friend was ushered into a quiet little room, and invited to stand in the centre, as he would be better able to see it. He, suspecting no harm, did so. In an instant the floor gave way at a preconcerted signal between Grimaud and Blulette, and M. Trevelyan was thrown down into a cellar. He fell at least six feet, and is probably much injured. Grimaud would have robbed and killed him by this time, had he not been expecting the advent of the party to which Trevelyan happily or unhappily alluded when he came into the house. You need not be surprised at my knowing you, because it is a primary duty of the Parisian police to know and make themselves acquainted with the names and features of everybody who enters the place—that is to say, the city."

"This is wonderful," said Skittles. "I believe you now. Pardon my doubts. How can we save Trevelyan?"

"It is in your power to save him," replied Barosse. "Were I or any of my men to attempt to seize Grimaud just now, it is impossible to say whether or not he may have some infernal machine which will cause an explosion; he has been heard to say that he would blow his house up sooner than its secrets should be penetrated by the police. I do not know what this means; it may be an idle threat, and it may, on the other hand, be a significant phrase, full of dreadful meaning."

"What shall I do? I am ready to risk my life."

"I will not so far trespass upon your courage and good nature as to demand that," said Barosse, with a look of admiration; "everyone knows how brave you are—witness your duel this morning."

"You know that?"

"It would appear so."

"Why, then, did you not stop it?"

"Because we have no peremptory instructions to put down duelling. Although I live under and obey the ruler of the Second Empire, I remember the *ancien régime*, and respect my traditions; but come, countess, we are losing time."

"Tell me your scheme."

"You shall go by yourself to the 'Last Half-penny,' and ask for the room which your friend had been inquiring for; you will be at once ushered in by Bluette, who is a clever, pretty little girl, and much too good to be shut up in a prison for five years under extenuating circumstances, as she infallibly will be before long; you will be told to stand upon the trapdoor, which will suddenly give way, but you must contrive to step on one side, so that the chasm may yawn in vain for you. The trapdoor is only really formidable when you are ignorant of its existence. In this instance to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and you will nimbly avoid the fate that the dear Bluette will provide for you."

"I perceive," said Skittles.

"Stop a bit, countess; I have not developed the

whole of my counter-plot," said Barossez; "when the ill-success of the scheme becomes apparent, Blurette will be paralysed with terror, and incapable of action, so that any signal given her by Grimaud will pass her comprehension, and be disregarded by her."

"Well?"

"The house is at this moment surrounded by a *cordon* of police," continued Barossez, "six *gendarmes* are in the *cabaret* disguised as *ouvriers*, wearing blouses, and talking a hideous *patois*. It is morally and physically impossible that Grimaud can escape. As soon as I hear you cry out, which you must be good enough to do as soon as the trap-door has fallen without letting you down, it shall be my business to arrest Grimaud, then all that will remain to be done will be the release of M. Trevelyan, who I trust is uninjured; I am of opinion that nothing more serious than a shaking is to be apprehended."

"I hope not indeed."

"And now, my dear madame, do you feel equal to the task I have proposed to you?"

"Yes, I am positive that I shall be able to carry out your instructions, though I should feel a little more comfortable if I could have a pistol to make use of in case of any unforeseen emergency."

Barossez took a small weapon of delicate workmanship from an inner pocket, saying—

"Take this; it has three chambers, consequently you have the disposal of three lives."

"And you——"

"Oh, I am well provided."

"What about my friends?"

"Say nothing. Send them back to the music hall, and say you will join them there."

"Very well."

Barossez waved his hand and disappeared.

Skittles had the greatest difficulty to believe in the reality of what had just taken place. It was all so like a dream—a feverish dream—a hideous nightmare. She had read and heard of dreadful man-traps in various low public-houses in the still lower districts of Paris, but she had been of opinion that they existed solely in the vivid imaginations of clever authors and novelists who were hard pushed for sensational incidents, but now the actual fact came before her in a most marked and unmistakeable manner. The thought of Trevelyan being in danger made her nerve herself to great exertion, and by a desperate effort she summoned all her courage to her aid, murmuring—

"I must forget that I am a woman, and for a time act the part of a brave man, who, like Lord Nelson, knows not what fear is."

Turning to Valentine and Cotton Sanders, she exclaimed—

"I don't want you to come into the public-house with me; I would rather go by myself, and see what Trevelyan is doing. It would be worth a fortune to me to find him spooning some dirty little *grisette* over, because when he is talking to me he always pretends to be as good as gold, never supposing for a moment that I know him to be a thorough-going humbug."

"What shall we do?" said Valentine.

"Oh, go back to the music hall, and wait there until I send Trevelyan to fetch you."

"That seems rather a chouse," remarked Sir Cotton Sanders. "I like a bit of fun as well as anybody, and when it would make us laugh to catch Trevelyan, you send us back to that odious *café chantant*."

"Go along with you; cannot you make love to Valentine?"

"I can, of course, but it's very, very—what do you call a stone or a brick wall?"

"Hard."

"Yes; it's very hard."

"Nonsense. Carry him off, Valentine, there's a dear, good child; I really must be by myself," said Skittles.

Valentine was only too pleased to have the English "Milor" all to herself. She had taken rather a fancy to him, and as he was rich, well-connected, and possessed of a title, she thought she could not do better than throw her vagrant affections upon him, and enchain him as long as he remained in Paris.

They walked away together, and Skittles was alone, and able to carry out the precise instructions which Barossez, the chief of the detective police, had given her. As she thought over the way in which he had acquired all the information he had displayed, she became quite alarmed at the immense power of that widely-spread system of *espionage* whose ramifications were extended amongst every

class of society, from the highest to the lowest. She could not help regarding Barossez with positive wonder, so admirable was the system of which he was the able exponent and representative. Thier-catching was reduced by Barossez to a science, and made one of the most exact of all the sciences.

Skittles entered the "Last Halfpenny" with her heart palpitating violently, yet she managed to still its beating and to look calm externally. It was a trying moment for her, and one in which she might have well been pardoned for feeling a little nervous. Suppose that she missed her footing when standing upon the dreaded board. Suppose that she was not sufficiently nimble when the trap-door gave way, and she was precipitated to the bottom of that dungeon in which Trevelyan was then languishing, probably with a broken leg. Suppose—but supposition upon such a matter was endless—one might suppose all sorts of dreadful things, and she acted with great wisdom in refusing to suppose anything. She fixed her thoughts and her energies upon the work before her, and resolved to do her best to entitle herself to the praise of Barossez.

On entering the "Dernier Sou," Bluettes at once presented herself to the lady, and asked her what she could have the pleasure of doing for her. Skittles replied in indifferent French that a friend of hers, a dark gentleman, had left her some time ago at the music hall, saying that he would look out for a room where they could partake of refreshments, and she was inclined to believe that he had come to the house in which Bluettes was barmaid. Bluettes

at once replied that the lady was right in her conjecture. Monsieur had come to the "Last Half-penny," and had been ushered into a room which seemed to please him and take his fancy; that he had inspected it, partaken of a glass of brandy-and-water, and had only a few minutes before left the place, expressing his intention of going back to the music hall and bringing his friends.

"So it is clear," concluded Blulette, "that madame and monsieur must have passed one another on the road, though that is not surprising considering how dark the night is, and how badly this particular part of Paris is lighted."

Skittles knew this to be an infamous story and a wicked invention; but instead of saying so she smiled affably, pretending to believe every word of the falsity, and to take it all in like a lamb. Mons. Grimaud at this juncture came out, and said—

"Would madame like to go into the *salon* and wait until monsieur comes back? It would be better," added the *aubergiste*, "than going back to the music hall, as there were so many bad characters about, it was impossible to make sure of anything. Really the police, Messieurs the Police, were incompetent and not at all fit to take care of the lives and property of the public."

Skittles expressed her willingness to go into the parlour, there to await the advent of her friend, who she thought would not be long in following her. The bar was full of a set of noisy fellows, who were drinking *château margaux* and *vin ordinaire*, with an occasional sip of brandy to correct the

acidity of the two first-mentioned beverages. They were laughing, singing, and swearing. Some were talking to women of the town, and several soldiers in uniform might be seen without the bar and in the taproom, conversing amicably with their *chère amies* of the evening, their ephemeral butterfly acquaintances.

Grimaud commanded Blulette to conduct madame to the *salon*, and said that he would follow in a short time with some champagne of the first quality, which he had procured direct from the very best vintage in France, paying a good price for it, as he was determined to please his customers, and cared very little about making a large profit on the articles he sold. Blulette led the way without exhibiting any compunction this time. She did not care for women, especially if the woman in question was pretty and good-looking, as "the" Laraquez undoubtedly was. For men, if they were handsome, she could feel compassion; and even then she was not compassionate enough to save them from the horrid doom to which the monster Grimaud condemned them. When the fatal room was reached Skittles braced up her nerves afresh, and putting one hand in the pocket of her dress kept her fingers upon the pistol with which Barossez had presented her. Blulette exclaimed—

"Is it not a nice room, madame? I do not think you could meet with one more comfortable in the quarter; how does madame like it? Come over here, madame, and stand in the centre, you will be better able to see the dimensions. There—

there, that is it; now madame will have a good view."

Skittles obeyed Blurette's instructions to the letter, and looking down on the floor perceived several chinks which denoted the dimensions of the trap-door. Spreading her dress, she placed one foot on the floor outside the square which showed where the trap was, and leaning all her weight upon that one foot felt that she should be able to jerk herself back directly the floor began to give way beneath her. During the whole of the time she was engaged in making these preparations and taking these salutary precautions she kept up a running fire of questions, which Blurette felt herself bound to answer in her most civil and obliging way, saying to herself the while—

"Oh! hasn't she got beautiful rings and bracelets? that with the turquoises shall be mine. Father Grimaud shall not sell that to the Dutch Jew, Mynheer Van Dunk. I will also have that watch and chain. Oh, my! how splendid it is, and how the gold glitters in the gaslight! It shall be mine, and then *sous officier* Marchant shall pay me more attention than he ever did since he first came into the *Bocages des Evangelistes*."

During this soliloquy Skittles was thinking—"Oh, the artful little beast! Fancy her being so cool and unconcerned when she means to do her best to kill me! I hope the police will take her and give her some hard labour at the treadmill—the stepper is the only thing that will do her any good. I never saw such an abandoned and depraved

hussy in all my life. I hope I shall prove myself cleverer than she is. It will be a pleasure to bowl her out."

Bluette went to the door and gave the preconcerted signal as before. Suddenly Skittles found the floor giving way, and throwing herself back she escaped being engulfed by a miracle. Looking down she saw a big chasm, at the bottom of which was nothing but impenetrable darkness. She fully expected that Bluette would faint or run away with a startled cry, but she was greatly mistaken. The girl was more determined than she had any idea of. Instead of doing either of the things that Skittles had supposed, she made a sudden rush up to her, and attempted to push her down the hole. A terrible struggle took place. Skittles would have drawn her pistol had not her arms been required for her own defence. Bluette fought like a little tigress; but she found more than a match for her exertions in Skittles, who exclaimed—

"I haven't fought a lot of women at Kate's for nothing, as you'll find out, you dirty little *grivoise*."

Bluette did not like to call out for assistance because a great many people, who were drinking in the bar, would hear her and would come to help her, and infallibly see the trap-door, which would reveal the secrets of the prison-house. By a violent effort Skittles managed to overthrow her antagonist and send her reeling towards the pit, into which she tumbled head first. This was a terrible exemplification of the biter bit—this was a dispensation

of the Divine will, an interposition of Providence on the behalf of the intended victim. When she was free Skittles ran to the brink of the pit, and peered into the depths which were revealed to her. She could see nothing, though smothered groans arose and saluted her ears with a dismal cadence. When Blurette fell she had heard a dull thud, as if her body had come in contact with some hard substance, and she was uncharitable enough to wish that "the little beast had broken her neck." A noise was heard outside—a sound arose as of many people speaking together, and in a high tone. This denoted the capture of Grimaud, who was surrounded by Barosseze and his satellites; he was taken in his own bar when he least expected such a catastrophe, and the handcuffs glistened on his wrists before he had the power or the opportunity to move hand or foot to liberate himself from the detestable thralldom in which he was placed.

"Aha! M. Grimaud," exclaimed Barosseze; "so we have you at last, eh? and we are now about to explore your hell-shaft, which is answerable for many a crime which the guillotine will shortly avenge."

This may to English people seem a strange speech for a police officer to make use of, the English law requiring officers to caution prisoners against saying anything, as everything they do say will be used against them in evidence; but the French law essentially wishes criminals to betray themselves, and takes every underhand opportunity of inviting them to betray themselves, for very many prisoners

are condemned upon their own confession, and nothing more ; when very slight *evidentia rei* is forthcoming, then the police attack the culprit and watch his every utterance.

Barossez dragged Grimaud to the *salon* in which the pitfall was situated, and then they saw Skittles prying into the hole

“Where is Blurette ?” inquired Barossez.

Skittles pointed with her finger to the Tartarean gulf, and said—

“There ; she tried all she knew to shy me down, but I was one too many for her.”

“How—how were you made aware of all this ?” said Grimaud ; “you must have been upon your guard or this miscarriage would not have happened.”

“Who told me ?” said Skittles ; “oh ! Miles’s boy. I mustn’t tell tales out of school. I *was* told, if that’s any satisfaction to you, and you see that you were not able to best me as you intended.”

“Come, let us look for ‘Trevelyan,” said Barossez. “Bring a ladder and lantern, and the mystery shall soon be solved.”

Two men departed to do his bidding.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDERGROUND.

WHEN Trevelyan fell into the diabolical trap which cunning Mr. Grimaud had set for him, he fortunately alighted upon his legs, afterwards stumbling forward upon his face, and sustaining no positive injury whatever. The trap-door, obedient to some hidden mechanism, revolved upon its hinges, and as he looked up all was blank, desolate, and dark. He remained in the place in which he had fallen, afraid to move lest some new danger might menace him. It struck him that he heard the sound of water running close by him, but he was unable to see whether or not he was mistaken, owing to the funereal darkness which reigned on all sides.

"Curses on the rascally fellow!" he exclaimed; "I suppose it is a case of robbery and murder. That's remarkably lively for a man who has lived nearly forty years in the world, and who has gone through everything and come out with an occasional scratch or two; the worst of it is I'm not armed. If I had suspected any of this hocus-pocus sort of thing I should have brought a pistol. What a confounded ass I was to trust myself in such a rookery

and such a den as the Groves of the Evangelists and this infamous place the "Last Halfpenny!"

As he spoke a key grated in the lock, and a light announced the presence of Grimaud. This worthy, thirsting after gold, had been unable to resist the temptation of viewing his prize, and appropriating the property he had upon him, so that he had stolen down to the cellar in which the victim of his rascally designs was caged and had unlocked the door, thinking that a pistol he held in his hand would intimidate Trevelyan and make him give up everything valuable that he had about him. The instant Trevelyan saw him he dropped upon one leg and groaned piteously, as if he wished to intimate that his leg was broken.

"Broke your leg, eh?" said Grimaud in French, which was the only language with which he was acquainted, and even that he did not know in all its purity. "Come, let me have your watch and your money. Quick, for my time is valuable."

"I can offer no resistance," replied Trevelyan; "I am too much injured; help yourself; but——"
"What?"

"I hope you will have me taken to some surgeon's as soon as possible, the fracture I am afraid is a compound one, as my leg is so painful. The suffering I am at this moment undergoing is, I assure you, excruciating."

"Oh, yes! we'll attend to that," said Grimaud, setting his lantern down upon the ground and laying his pistol by the side of it; "what valuables have you about you, and in which pocket am I to look for them?"

Trevelyan was overjoyed at the idea of outwitting Grimaud, who evidently believed in the sham which had been palmed off upon him.

"I have a watch," he replied, "in my waistcoat pocket, and in the breast pocket of my coat there is a pocket-book containing five thousand francs in notes and gold, all of which is yours, if you will only be good enough to take me away and have my hurt looked to."

Grimaud's eyes sparkled at the idea of so much wealth—he had calculated on a watch and some ready money, but five thousand francs was a very large sum, and one that he did not meet with every day, although his nefarious and iniquitous trade put a good deal of money in his way at one time and another. His intention was to have despatched Trevelyan at once with the butt-end of his pistol, only his cupidity had incited him to plunder as the *avant courier* of murder. When his prisoners were uninjured through their fall and recalcitrant, he generally retired after visiting them and ascertaining the fact, because he was afraid to shoot them until the last of his customers had gone away. The noise of a pistol exploding would have been heard in the bar, and much speculation as to the cause of the horrid rumbling noise would have been the result.

Approaching Trevelyan he sank upon both knees so as to be better able to rifle his pockets, and discarding all fear, so thoroughly was he taken in and deceived by Trevelyan's statement, he took hold of his watch, drew it from the fob, and leant over a little towards the lantern so as to examine

it and test its value. The watch was a well-made, solid gold, English watch, manufactured by one of the best makers in London, jewelled in a number of holes, and worth thirty or forty guineas.

Up to this time Trevelyan had not attempted to defend himself, but now he sprang to his feet with the nimbleness and celerity of a deer. He did not, as might have been expected, attack Grimaud at a disadvantage; he made a rush for the pistol and lantern, both of which he seized without being interrupted. With a cry like that of a lion baffled when in the act of making a meal, Grimaud sprang at Trevelyan, sprang at him only to be confronted with the gleaming barrel of his own pistol, which was presented at his head. Here was a dilemma he had not taken into consideration; how could he have anticipated that such an unusual contingency should have arisen? No motive against not discharging the pistol such as had swayed him, would be likely to have much weight with Trevelyan. There was nothing for Grimaud to do but to run. This he did without a moment's hesitation—with a wonderful spring, half skip, half hop, half jump, he reached the door. There is a saying in some parts of the world, "as agile as a frog or a Frenchman;" it was verified in this instance, for he was gone before Trevelyan could pull trigger, or stay his purpose; this was the more annoying as the prisoner heard the key grate in the lock a second time and knew that he was locked in. Uttering an exclamation which bordered upon blasphemy, he sat down and brooded over his position, which he was forced to

confess was, though forlorn and desperate in the extreme, much improved for the better ; before he was terribly at the mercy of his enemies, now he not only had the means of self-defence, but enjoyed a light to see what he was shooting at, and whom he was doing battle with. This was a great thing gained, and one that he was cordially thankful for. His light could not burn for ever ; on examining it, he found it to contain a good supply of oil, enough perhaps to last him for six hours. After looking about him he discovered that he had not been mistaken when he fancied he heard the sound of running water. What appeared to be a surface drain, but which was in reality a sewer of some magnitude, ran through the dungeon, disappearing under an arch in the right-hand wall. Listening to the bubbling water he remained speculating as to what he should do next. He fully expected that Grimaud would wait until midnight, and then make an attack upon him in force, or have recourse to some diabolical device against which he could not be on his guard. What was to prevent him from starving him to death ! As this horrible contingency occurred to him he trembled and turned pale. The sewer water still continued to purl along with all the innocence of a pellucid brook.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT BECAME OF TREVELYAN.

THE man who had been despatched by Barosseze was not long in bringing a ladder, which was placed in the shaft down which the victims of Grimaud were precipitated. It touched the bottom after being lowered about six feet and a half, and Barosseze with two satellites prepared to descend.

"Will you come, madame?" said Barosseze to Skittles.

"No, thanks; I would rather not," she replied.

Barosseze bowed, and placing one foot upon the ladder commenced the descent. She would have descended at any other time, but she did not exactly like to encounter the body of Bluetie, which she with reason supposed was injured in some way, if the girl was not killed altogether. A crowd of those who had been drinking crowded into the room, and amongst them the American whom Trevelyan had so signally defeated in front of the bar, before he was decoyed into the man-trap of M. Grimaud. The Yankee was noisily and uproariously drunk; the police had the greatest difficulty in keeping him quiet, and it was evident

that some *sergent-de-ville* would march him off to the nearest lock-up if he were not quiet. Skittles was allowed to stand inside the magic circle formed by the police, and she regarded the Yankee with some amusement. Sometimes he swore, sometimes he sang scraps of silly songs, such as—

“Looking at the gin-and-water,
How the time does slip away !
Oh ! could I kiss old Mudtub’s daughter,
Wonder what the girl would say !”

Here his muse was sadly offended as a policeman “helped him on,” and took him out of the place.

When Barossez entered the vault he allowed his subordinates to alight and then snatched a lantern from one of them. As the rays fell upon the damp ground, which was partly covered with mildew of a rank and luxuriant nature, he perceived a body apparently dead, lying right in front of him. Approaching it carefully he turned it over, and flashing the lantern on the features, recognised Blulette in an instant ; the girl was insensible and incapable of motion ; he felt her pulse and it had stopped. He placed his ear to her mouth without detecting the smallest flow of breath ; then he fell on his knees, and examined her closely, discovering that her neck was broken. She had fallen upon the back of her head, sustaining an injury of the spine, a fracture of the skull, and was stone dead.

“It is a pity,” murmured Barossez ; “she might have repented, have done well yet. If it had been that old scoundrel upstairs, whom Jacques and

Edouard have in charge, I should only have shed crocodile's tears. Pretty girl!—well, well, a judgment often overtakes evil-doers when they least expect it. Take her up the ladder," he said to his men, "and let her be laid on some bed upstairs. I will look about here for the gentleman."

The men religiously and carefully grasped the dead body which was yet warm. The muscles had not had time to assume the rigidity of death, and the face still flushed with the hot but gradually cooling blood. They contrived by dint of exertion to get it up the ladder, and laid it down on the floor.

"Is she dead?" exclaimed Skittles.

"Yes, madame," replied one of the men; "she has broken her neck."

Casting a compassionate glance upon her, Skittles said—

"Poor thing, I am sorry for her, but she provoked her fate. It was her or me; and naturally I preferred self-preservation."

When Grimaud heard that his niece was dead, he became furiously excited.

"Dead! dead!" he cried, struggling violently with the officers who held him in charge, "who says she is dead? It's not true. It is a lie—an infamous lie! Let me get to her. She is but fainting; let me see and speak to her."

The police held him back for some time, but the wretched man's struggles became so violent, and his outcries so vehement, that they at last yielded to his wishes, and permitted him to approach what

remained of his once beautiful and too obedient niece. Now it so happened that Grimaud had a weak point, and that weak point—that one soft spot in the block of granite—was his love for Blurette. He had always loved her, although his brutal nature would only permit him to show it at intervals. If he had a dog to which he was attached, he would half his time kick and starve it, because it was his nature to do so, and the fellow hardly knew the strength of his affection until he was actually deprived of the object upon which he had lavished it.

He staggered towards Blurette, and fell on his knees by her side, touching her gently and tenderly with his manacled hands, now pressing her arms, and the next minute patting her cheeks.

"Blurette! Blurette!" he said, "look up, *ma mie*. Look up, and speak to me. They say you are dead—rise and laugh at them. You cannot die when poor Grimaud speaks to you and wishes you to live. Awake, my darling, throw off this lethargic slumber."

Suddenly his countenance fell—he seemed like one stricken with the palsy—his head fell forward on his breast, and his hands dropped listlessly by his side, hanging there motionless and useless.

"Dead! dead! dead!" he moaned, in a heart-broken tone; "*après cela l'échafaud*."

Then he rolled over by the side of Blurette's body, and kissing her livid lips, which were stained with the purple froth of the death-agony, he wept like a woman.

While this was taking place *en haut*, Barossez was much perplexed and bewildered below. Although he searched every inch of the dungeon, he could find no trace whatever of him he was in search of. Trevelyan had mysteriously disappeared; he was nowhere to be seen. Barossez was perplexed; he could not exactly understand this fact. Had Grimaud murdered his prisoner during the brief space which elapsed between his capture and the appearance of the police upon the scene of action? It was scarcely probable, but yet it was possible, and Barossez determined to search the house to see if he could discover any trace of a dead body.

When he rejoined Skittles, she said, eagerly—

“Well, well, where is Mr. Trevelyan?”

“I do not know,” replied Barossez.

“Not know!” she said.

“The fact is precisely what I have had the honour to tell you.”

“What has this monster,” she cried, pointing to Grimaud, “what has he done with him? He is my friend; and I must and will have him found! Do you hear? He shall be found!”

“We will do our best; but at present he is not in the dungeon.”

“Have you searched it thoroughly?”

“I have.”

“I am not satisfied with your search. I suppose you have no objection to my going down into the vault in order to satisfy myself?”

“No objection whatever. Pray do so, if you have the slightest inclination that way.”

Skittles did not hesitate about availing herself of this permission. She took a lantern from one of the men, and, preceded by Barossez, descended the ladder without any mishap. She searched the dungeon as carefully as Barossez had done, and acknowledged that she could not find Trevelyan. But although she was unsuccessful in her search, she did what the detective had been unable to do—she discovered some signs of water having been splashed upon the edge of the brickwork through which the sewer matter flowed.

“Look here!” she exclaimed, “do you see this? He has been killed and thrown into this sewer. My God! he has been foully murdered.”

Barossez seemed at first inclined to hold the same opinion, but after looking at the traces of disturbed water, he said—

“I do not think that what you see has been caused by the submerging of a body. We can however, if you like, go upstairs and question Grimaud. In his present state of despair, he may be inclined to admit something.”

Skittles made no objection to this proposition, and they ascended the ladder—had the room cleared of all the spectators, leaving only a few policemen who were required in the execution of their duty. Grimaud was dragged before Barossez, and said, sullenly—

“What do you want with me? You have killed my niece—my poor dear Bluetie—and the sooner you kill me now the better.”

“That was her own fault,” said Barossez. “Why did you kill the gentleman?”

"Kill him! I never killed him, as God is my witness!" replied Grimard, with vehement gesticulation.

"How can you say that, when he is nowhere to be seen?"

"Then the devil must have claimed his own, and spirited him away."

"That theory is absurd! What have you done with him?"

"Nothing."

"Confess!"

"I am unable to; all I know is, that I left the gentleman in the vault, and if he is not there now, I can't tell where he is."

"There is nothing to be got from this fellow," said Skittles. "He evidently knows a great deal, and will tell nothing. I am sorry Trevelyan has been murdered. He was a very old friend. Guard the prisoner well, Mr. Barosse, and if he gives any clue follow it up. I shall return to my companions. The atmosphere of this place is blood-stained, and suffocates me."

"I wish you good evening, madame," said Barosse.

"Good night! Of course, if you hear any news, or have any tidings to bring me, I may depend upon you letting me know?"

"Most assuredly, madame."

"I live at——"

"I am well acquainted with your address," said Barosse, interrupting her.

"It seems to me that you know everything ex-

cept what one wants to know," replied Skittles, who did not appear to be in the best of tempers.

Barosseze smiled grimly, and Skittles went away. "Barosseze did not leave the premises, he remained at the "Last Halfpenny" with several of his cleverest and most trusty officers for some time. Grimaud was sent away to prison, and Bluettes's dead body was placed in her own room upstairs, where *bisaieule* stayed with the corpse to keep away the cats, vampires, and evil spirits generally.

When Skittles reached the music hall, Sir Cotton Sanders exclaimed—

"What a long time you have been away; we began to get quite alarmed and uneasy about you. There are so many bad characters about."

"Yes; I am perfectly well aware of that," she replied.

"Where is Mr. Trevelyan?" said Valentine.

"That is just what nobody knows, though I rather suspect he is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes; and his body chucked into a sewer."

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Valentine, covering her face with her hands.

"I say," cried Sir Cotton Sanders, "you're not in earnest?"

"Upon my soul I am! I wish to Heaven I wasn't!"

"He can't be dead."

"I wish you'd produce him, then."

In a few words Skittles told them all that had

happened, and they were much astonished at the startling recital, as may be expected.

Of course the story threw a damp upon them, and they left the Groves of the Evangelists to return to Valentine's house, where some good champagne was to be met with, and which they hoped would dissipate the gloom which sat so heavily upon them. When they were all seated in Valentine St. Roche's gaudily-furnished drawing-room, "the" Laraquez exclaimed—

"I don't know what you people mean to do. I shall go in for a jolly good drunk. I am beastly cut up at Trevelyan's loss, and I will show my respect for his memory by getting as tight as Val's champagne will let me."

"I shall certainly follow your most praiseworthy example," said Sir Cotton Sanders, giving some wine to both the ladies, and drinking some himself, saying—

"Drink to the lass ;

Let the toast pass ;

I warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass."

"Drinking healths is not fashionable, is it?" said Valentine.

"No, I believe not ; like the good old fashion of introducing people to one another, it has gone out of vogue," replied Sir Cotton. "By the way, *a propos* of fashions, how awfully low ladies wear evening dresses, quite indelicate you know, showing too much—too much——"

"Bosom, do you mean?"

"Yes, of course. How infernally stupid I am! Showing a little too much bosom."

"Oh, no! not at all. Men can never have too much of a good thing," said Skittles, with a laugh.

"I must run away for a moment," said Valentine; "you will excuse me, dear, will you not? I want to look after the supper."

Skittles nodded. When Sir Cotton Sanders found himself alone with "the" Laraquez, he approached her, sat by her side, and said—

"Is it not nice to be left alone by ourselves?"

"I don't know; it depends entirely upon whether one's companion is lively or not."

"Am I not lively?"

"Not particularly at this moment."

"I will try and improve."

"There is plenty of room for improvement. I think you want trotting out," said Skittles, with charming candour.

"Trot me out, then."

"All right. You wouldn't be the first lame dog I have helped over a stile."

"What do you think of me?" said Sir Cotton Sanders.

"Well, not much. Your whiskers are the best things about you."

"Do you like whiskers?"

"Yes. I have no objection to hair when it's long and silky; it is so nice to nestle one's nose in."

"Oh, how funny you are! What funny things you say!" exclaimed the baronet.

"Not at all."

"Where did you get your ideas from?"

"A different place from that at which you got yours. Perhaps they are spontaneous; but look here, if the trotting-out process is to be satisfactorily accomplished, listen to me. I must talk to you, and ask you questions, instead of being interrogated by you."

"By all means."

"How long have you been in Paris?"

"Oh! some weeks now."

"I have never heard of you. Why don't you do something?"

"What! I shall be very glad of a few hints about notoriety."

"Why don't you run away with somebody's wife?"

"And get into the—the what's that Sir Cresswell Cresswell's place?"

"The Divorce Court."

"Yes—and get in there!"

"Exactly; the ladies will like you all the better for it."

"Will they, really?"

"You may take my word for that; but if you haven't pluck enough, or a good opportunity for that, start a woman."

"Oh! oh!" said Sir Cotton, "how killing you are!"

"I am only practical."

The conversation, which was verging on the amorous, was unfortunately interrupted by the re-

appearance of Valentine St. Roche, who shortly afterwards sat down at the piano, and played some new music from Gounod's last—"Le Médecin malgré lui." While she was playing, Sir Cotton whispered to Skittles—

"You said start a woman."

"Yes."

"What do you think of Valentine St. Roche?"

"Well, that's a d—— poor compliment, while I happen to be talking to you," said Skittles, loudly.

"What's that?" inquired Valentine, who left off playing as she heard her name mentioned.

"Why?" replied Skittles, "he's asking me if he shall keep you, and I have given him a reference which he seems strongly to object to."

"He might have the decency to wait till he's asked," said Valentine, growing very red in the face with annoyance and vexation.

At this juncture there was a loud knocking at the door.

"Who the devil is that?" said Valentine.

The servant opened the door, and was heard remonstrating in a violent tone with somebody; her expostulations did not appear to avail her much, however, for a heavy footfall was heard, and presently Trevelyan stalked into the room. Every one rose and regarded him with the utmost curiosity. He was saturated with moisture; he emitted an evil savour; he was hatless, and covered with mud and dirt, and, moreover, he seemed thoroughly exhausted.

"Trevelyan!" exclaimed every one in surprise.

"Yes," he replied in a faint voice, "thank God I'm alive, and you too! I hardly expected that we should meet again. Will some one give me a little brandy?"

He had the spirit in a moment, and it seemed to revive him.

"How did you escape?" inquired Sir Cotton Sanders.

"It is all owing to Barossez. He is a fine fellow."

"Barossez!" repeated Skittles; "I begin to think he is a most extraordinary man. Tell us all about it. How did you get away from that detestable Grimaud?"

"Can I change my things? I shiver with cold," said Trevelyan, who was as haggard as a corpse.

"Certainly."

"I don't care if I only have one of your chemises and a loose wrapper, with a pair of slippers, and just a little hot water in a tub, for I am rather pestilential than otherwise at present."

Skittles accompanied him upstairs and saw that all his wants were attended to, ministering to him with her own hands, and treating him with the utmost kindness. When he came downstairs, he was much improved, as far as his physical strength went, if not much could be said for his personal appearance. After a brisk fire of questions, Trevelyan said—

"I think I had better tell my story, and then you will all know what happened to me, and how I escaped the gates of hell, the jaws of destruction,

the Parisian Scylla and Charybdis, and all the rest of it ; but first of all give me wherewithal to assuage my thirst and spur my eloquence, as somebody says in a remarkably old play."

It will be seen that Trevelyan was becoming merry.

TREVELYAN'S STORY.

"WHEN I felt myself falling into the dungeon I gave myself up for lost," he began ; "and it was an immense relief to touch the ground, though at first I thought I had done so at the expense of a broken leg. I was a good deal shaken and not in a very good condition for fighting, though I was compelled to exert myself soon afterwards, for the wretch Grimaud came into the dungeon with a loaded pistol and a lantern. I had recourse to stratagem, and threw myself full length upon the floor, groaning and sighing as if my heart was breaking, all of which tended to confirm Grimaud's suspicion that I had broken my leg. When he asked me if I had sustained any injury, I replied in the affirmative, stating that I believed my right femur was broken in more than one place, and that I had sustained a severe fracture of the right leg. I pretended to be wholly and entirely incapable of action or of movement, and the fellow was duped into believing that I was too much hurt to offer any resistance, and that he could proceed to rob me with impunity. He asked me how much money I had, and in order to throw him off his guard and excite his cupidity and thirst for gold, I mentioned

a fabulously large sum, in the reality of which he fully believed. Laying down his pistol and lantern, side by side upon the floor, he flung himself upon his knees and began to rifle my pockets ; now was my opportunity, and you may be sure I did not neglect it. Springing up with the utmost celerity, I made for the pistol and the light, of which I possessed myself ; pointed the former at Grimaud, and threatened to blow his brains out ; but before I could stop him or take aim at him, he bounded to the door, gained the passage, escaped with his life, and I was once more a prisoner, though this time I had a light, and something to defend myself with.

“I sat down on the ground with my back to the wall, blaming myself for not having fired at the scoundrel, and either killed or brought him to his senses, when a thought occurred to me : a sewer ran through the wall very much as a surface drain does in some parts of the city. I got up and tried the depth of water ; it was fully three feet and a half, and being five feet wide, it was a drain of some magnitude and importance ; an immense volume of water passed through it and disappeared under an arch which was placed about two feet above the surface of the water. Possibly if the drain overflowed it would reach to the top of the arch. I thought as the water seemed low it would be possible for me to wade through the stream, and get into a main sewer, from which I could emerge, and regain my liberty. If I remained in the dungeon I felt sure that the monster Grimaud would devise some means of annihilating me ; possibly he would starve me to death ; so I

resolved to trust to fortune and the sewers. When I was about to plunge into the water, with the lantern upheld, I caught sight of an old door which had been torn from its hinges, and thrown into the dungeon, there to rot and be out of the way. I took it up with some difficulty, and placed it upon the water; to my delight it floated! I placed myself upon it and found to my inexpressible joy that it bore my weight. Here was a new adjunct to my escape. I was provided with a raft; the water bore me rapidly towards the arch; I bent my head, and the voyage began. I had to steer the raft with my hands, as the corners sometimes came in contact with the rough and ragged bricks with a jerk that threatened to capsize the amateur vessel. I sailed along gaily for fully a quarter of a mile; my lantern gave an excellent light, and had the effect of frightening away swarms of rats which had made the sewer their home. These I could see would be terrible enemies in the event of my being defenceless, and without a light. Grimaud no doubt murdered his victims in the dungeon and threw them into the sewer; by the stream of water running through which they were carried into the network of sewers, in which lived an immense horde of rats, who quickly stripped the flesh off the bones, and left the skeleton to be dealt with by the fetid waves. I had sailed along very comfortably for some time, wondering where I should emerge. Suddenly I felt my raft toppling over, I myself lost my balance and fell forward into a body of deep water, my lamp was extinguished,

the pistol fell from my hand, and I thought that my last hour had come ; but it was not so. Instead of falling into a cesspool or receptacle for stagnant water, I had fallen into the river Seine. This fact I did not ascertain before I had been submerged. I struggled to the surface as well as I was able, and when I got my eyes opened, looked up to see where I was.

“Oh ! the ecstatic bliss of that moment ! the transcendental exaltation I felt when instead of being confronted with darkness as impenetrable as a fog at midnight, I saw the lights of a bridge towering up above my head, and heard the nocturnal rumbling of the great city, which appeared to groan in its sleep. I had tumbled headlong over the edge of a low-level outfall, and had to struggle with the rapid waters of the Seine to prevent being sucked under by the current, and drowned. I was saved ! It is only tedious to prolong the story. A boatman picked me up, and on landing I walked until I found a fly, which for a heavy consideration brought me here.”

Skittles in her turn related how she had assisted at the capture of Grimaud, and the party was prolonged until a late hour. Every one congratulated him or herself upon the narrow escape they had had from the infamous plans and traps of Grimaud, against whom there was not sufficient evidence to condemn him to the guillotine ; but the judges thought so strongly of his case that they sent him to the galleys at Cayenne for the term of his natural

life. Blurette, who might have reformed and led a more virtuous existence had her life been spared, was buried in Père la Chaise, and a little marble cross of exquisite workmanship, erected by and at the expense of the *soi-disant* Countess Laraquez, marks her resting-place.

CHAPTER XIV.

VALENTINE'S JEALOUSY.

HAVE you heard anything lately of Laraquez?" exclaimed Trevelyan one day, as he called at Skittles' house in the Champs Elysées.

This house was one of her latest whims, and a model of good taste, voluptuousness, and reckless extravagance, combined with the most lavish expenditure.

"No," she replied, "I have heard nothing, and I don't want to hear anything."

"I suppose he has gone where the good niggers go."

"What about the bad niggers?"

"Oh, they of course feed the flames. What are you going to do? Are you in the market?"

"Now look here," she cried; "if you say that again the odds are ten thousand to one we fall out."

"I beg your pardon," he replied: "I had no idea that your wool was of such a flexible nature, and 'riz' so easily."

"I don't like you now, Trevelyan," said Skittles, with a look of supreme contempt and disgust; "you

are degenerating—I think you are becoming a beastly cad.”

“Possibly; the society amongst which I have lately mixed, has not been of the most select kind,” he said, carelessly.

“There you go again; you are determined to cheek me, and if you do, you will have bad luck.”

“I had not the remotest idea of cheeking you, as you elegantly phrase it—I came to say good-bye.”

“Are you off?”

“Yes.”

“What part of the world are you going to favour with your presence?”

“There is a little woman——”

“Ah! at your old games. You are incorrigible.”

“Well, the fact is, she is unhappy at home, and I have taken compassion upon her.”

“God help her! Poor devil!”

“Possibly He may do so, though your invocation is not in my opinion calculated to have much weight in quarters celestial,” rejoined Trevelyan, with unruffled serenity.

“One more remark like that, and out you go.”

“You would not be so cruel.”

“Oh, wouldn’t I! Don’t rely upon my charity and forbearance.”

“We are going simply and purely for the benefit of our health to a little *chalet* on the Tyrol, where we shall live a life of pastoral simplicity and innocence Arcadian; we start this evening. And now let me know what your plans are.”

“Plans! I have none. I am the most careless

creature in existence—I never think much before-hand. I think I shall do the widow for a time, by way of a change; I would rather hew wood and draw water than be always tied to a man's shirt-collar."

"May I ring for some sparkling Burgundy?"

"If you like."

"You must give me your blessing before I go."

"Don't be ridiculous. If you want anything of that sort, turn Catholic and kiss the Pope's toe."

Skittles was glad Trevelyan was going, and she told him so.

"I'm glad you're on the move," she added.

"Why?"

"Because you compromise me. People say I am spooney on you; and I have heard fellows say, She's always after Trevelyan; what she can see in the man I can't make out."

"That's a good joke, considering that I am both useful and ornamental."

She did not mean for a moment that she should live a life of single blessedness. Sir Cotton Sanders had paid her great attention, much to Valentine St. Roche's disgust. Valentine had taken a great fancy to the young baronet, and marked him for her own. Nothing pleased Skittles more, whether in Paris or London, than taking away a man who belonged to another woman; and if the woman in question happened to be friend of hers, the pleasure was all the more intense and heartfelt. Sir Cotton Sanders was a good-looking man, and one

that she did not mind being seen about with ; as she said, when in a moralizing mood—

“The fellow’s got money, and he’s safe to spend it on some one, so why shouldn’t he spend it over me ?”

She thought, in point of fact, that she was rather favouring him by permitting him to ruin himself over her, when there were so many more eligible candidates for the honour. If he did not “run a muck,” somebody else was sure to do so.

When a man goes out shooting in a wild country, and knows that if he is not successful, that is to say, if he does not bring down something edible, he will have no dinner, additional zest and excitement are lent to the expedition. So when Skittles thought that she could annoy and chagrin her friend Valentine by taking away Sir Cotton Sanders, she felt doubly anxious to do so. Sir Cotton did not need much encouragement ; he admired Skittles, and thought that he should acquire a certain amount of fame and notoriety by being her protector for a time. Herostratus burnt down the Ephesian temple of Diana in order to become famous, and that his name might descend to posterity ; all he wished, craved, and longed for was to be eternal and everlasting. Sir Cotton Sanders’ ambition did not soar so high as that ; he only wanted to be talked about in the circles of Parisian society in which he moved and was known, and he thought he should reach the summit and touch the highest pinnacle of this ambition by keeping “The” Laraquez. Valentine was pretty, and all very well *pour passer le temps*,

but few men admired her for anything else ; therefore the baronet transferred his allegiance to Skittles, who did not receive him graciously, as, in her opinion, "those sort of men required snubbing." She invariably snubbed men of a particular stamp, because those who were inclined to be cads, always gave themselves airs, and the only way to impress them was to arrogate to oneself greater airs than they themselves employed. He called one day soon after Trevelyan's departure for his Swiss *chalet*, in which he proposed to pass an existence of primæval guilelessness, and Skittles heard his voice on the landing. When the servant entered, before she could announce him or pronounce his name, her mistress exclaimed—

"I am at home to no one. Say I am out."

"Yes, madame," replied the servant, who came back presently saying, "The gentleman wishes me to give you his card."

The fact was that Sir Cotton had given the girl a Napolcon to take in his pasteboard.

"*Quelle bêtise.* Did I not say I was out?"

"Pardon, madame."

"Oh, don't talk to me ; I have no patience with such fools of servants. Show the man in."

Sir Cotton Sanders entered very humbly, saying—

"I have to apologize."

"I am perfectly aware of that fact, for a more unwarrantable intrusion I never witnessed in my life. I denied myself because I was busy and wished to be alone, and yet you send in your card and force yourself upon me. Were you the emperor,

or the chief of the domiciliary police, you couldn't do more."

"Really, I am very sorry, but I have called several times upon you without finding you at home, and to see you was essential to my happiness."

"Is your happiness to be considered before my comfort and my privacy?"

"I do not say that."

"That is the principle upon which you act, notwithstanding your denial of any such intention."

"I wish I might explain."

"Oh, certainly."

"I—I took a great liberty, and went to Gobertz, the jeweller's, and told him to send you some of the prettiest things in his shop; I thought you would be at a loss to tell from whom they came if I did not let you know, and you might send them away again."

"That is kind of you. As you have made the *amende* for your rudeness, you may stay and talk to me for a little while."

"Thanks; you have made me quite—quite—what are people when they go to Paradise?"

"Happy."

"Yes, quite happy."

"Sit down and smoke; I know that all you men like to smoke, and I will not spoil your fun; and while you smoke, I will tell you a secret."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Do not interrupt me; I hate being interrupted. I heard your voice on the stairs, and I

would not see you, because I thought you were the legal property of Valentine."

"St. Roche?"

"Yes; and I cannot bear to be accused of taking another woman's man away; why should I? I'm sure there are plenty of fellows after me. I have heaps of admirers, as I dare say you may have heard, so that even were you to favour me with your affection, you would not be honouring me so very highly, much as I might appreciate your love."

"Would you really appreciate my love?" inquired Sir Cotton Sanders, rapturously.

"Would I?"

"Yes."

"That is scarcely a fair question. If a woman does feel a little tenderly for a man, she never likes to proclaim the fact upon the house-tops, and let it be spoken of from Dan to Beersheba, and shouted about in Gath and Ascalon."

"Oh, no. I fully understand and sympathize with that sort of delicacy," said Sir Cotton.

"I will only say that I have met many men who are not half so entertaining as yourself, and not nearly so gentlemanly in their manner; and now you had better run away, or we shall have the St. Roche after us, to give us both a hiding."

"I assure you she is nothing to me."

"Am I to believe that?"

"Indeed you—you—what's the third person present of the subjunctive of to be?"

"Do you mean 'may'?"

"Yes; of course you may believe it, for I don't care a straw for her."

"In that case, you may come again to-morrow."

A subdued cry might have been heard in the corridor, but both Skittles and her visitor were so much engaged with their own affairs that they did not notice it. A moment afterwards the servant entered, and exclaimed—

"Madame St. Roche!"

"The—the—what's that fellow who lives down below, and goes about seeking whom he may devour—the one that fought his master, and got kicked out of Heaven?"

"The devil?"

"Yes; I say, what the devil shall I do? Can't you hide me somewhere?"

"I don't think I can."

"Is there no cupboard?"

"Not one."

"I say!"

"What?"

The light of sudden inspiration and of genius shone in Sir Cotton Sanders' eyes.

"Can't you stand up against the mantelpiece, and let me get under your crinoline? I'm sure it is big enough to hide me."

"Oh, no; I couldn't think of such a thing."

"But you must. I would not have Valentine find us together for the world."

He did not give Skittles time to reply to his impetuous and imperative demand, for he heard a rustling of silk in the corridor, and he knew that no time was to be lost. Skittles was leaning against the mantelpiece; perhaps she had moved in that direction out of compassion to her lover, and

with a wish to comply with his demands; at all events, he took her attitude for a tacit consent, and rushing behind her, ensconced himself with happy audacity beneath the voluminous folds of her capacious crinoline. He had barely time to congratulate himself on his narrow escape, when he heard Valentine St. Roche's voice, and almost stifling his breath, he remained as quiet as human nature would permit him. Skittles did not attempt to move to meet her friend. If she had done so, she would have betrayed Sir Cotton Sanders. Valentine had heard Sir Cotton's voice, so she was positive that he was in the room, and she entered prepared to lecture him upon his inconstancy and want of fidelity. Great was her surprise when she was unable to see anyone except "The" Laraquez. With the tact of a Frenchwoman, she at once adapted herself to the situation, and with a smile on her face, said—

"Ah, how you do? I was passing by, and I thought I would call."

"You are very kind, I am sure," replied Skittles, who did not ask her to sit down.

"You do not give me chair, so I shall seat myself."

"Do so."

"It is ver cold this morning."

"Do you think so? I find it getting rather hot."

"Indeed!"

There was a pause.

"Why you not sit down?"

"Thank you, I am very jolly."

"Not with me. Why you so unfriendly?"

"I unfriendly!"

"Yes."

"With you?"

"Yes."

"I had no intention of being so. I have been sitting down all the morning writing letters, and it is a positive relief to be able to stand for a short time."

"Perhaps. I have been to market to-day."

"What have you bought?"

"A dear *écureuil*. What you say—squirrel. Oh, such a pet; and a dear little dog. My servant is outside with them; I will call her."

"No, no, don't."

"Oh yes, I will."

"I should be sorry to trouble you."

"No trouble at all, my dear."

"But——"

"Lisette."

"*Oui, madame.*"

"*Apportez l'écureuil et le petit chien.*"

"*Bien*," said Lisette, who to Skittles' horror and dismay entered with the animals in question. The latter thought that the dog might perhaps be gifted with a keen scent and bark at her crinoline, which would cause suspicion amongst those who were looking on.

"See the squirrel first," said Valentine, taking it from Lisette's hands. "It is quite tame, and will not bite a bit."

As if to belie her words, the squirrel fixed its teeth—its sharp-edged, pike-like teeth—in the fleshy part of her hand. She let it fall with a scream. The little thing, who had not long been taken from its native woods, stood a moment on the carpet, whisking its tail and speculating as to the proper direction in which to flee from the Philistines by whom it was menaced and surrounded; ultimately its vagrant thoughts suggested to it that “The” Laraquez’s extensive skirt would make an excellent hiding-place, and one that it might resort to without let or hindrance. When it had fully resolved upon adopting this course, it scampered off and got under Skittles’ dress. She was afraid to kick it or even to stoop down to drive it away, lest she should expose Sir Cotton Sanders to detection and disgrace, and give the gossips and scandal-mongers of Paris a good story to tell in the clubs and over their wine; so she put on a dignified air and pretended to take no notice of it, fully expecting that Sir Cotton Sanders would have sufficient sense to seize the little wretch and wring its neck before it could annoy her. The squirrel ran over her foot, and, as she had slippers on, caused her a little pain with its claws.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, involuntarily.

“Lisette!” cried Valentine. “Run, run; the beast is biting madame.”

When Lisette approached to interfere and rescue madam from the annoyance and danger with which she was threatened, Skittles waved her back, but she would not be restrained.

"No, no," said Skittles; "it has gone."

"I will catch it, madame," replied Lisette.

"It is not there."

"I will see madame shall not be torn to pieces."

"Go away."

"Not yet, madame. If you do not feel it, it is up your dress—he may bite you."

"I am not afraid."

Skittles threw up her hands in despair, for Lisette, not to be deterred by threats, remonstrances, or commands, sank on her knees and put her hands under Skittles' dress, with a view of catching the squirrel. Sir Cotton Sanders could hear the dialogue which had taken place, and he was able to see the magnitude of the danger which menaced him; so when Lisette's daring hand went under the skirt of the crinoline shield, he caught it in his mouth, drew her fingers between his teeth, and bit them as squirrel never bit before.

"Oh, oh!" cried Lisette, in an agony of pain, and withdrawing her hand as soon as possible. "Oh, my God! what big teeth—what a devil to bite! Oh, great God! my hand, it is all devoured."

"I told you it would bite you," said Skittles, who guessed the truth, and had the greatest difficulty to suppress her laughter. Lisette made no reply; she ran into a corner, and sitting down there subsided into a state of growling misery.

"Get up, you stupid," shouted her mistress.

"No, madame," replied Lisette, between her groans.

"Help madame."

"I am dying."

"Nonsense."

"You are answerable for my wounds."

"Donkey!"

"Do not alarm yourself about me," said Skittles, still immovable—still statuesque.

"You will be bitten."

"I think not."

"But it is a vile wretch of a thing. It has bitten me and Lisette, and it will bite your leg."

"I do not feel it."

"Do not hurt it. Stoop down, and throw it out of the window."

"I would rather take my chance; it will most likely go up the chimney."

"Oh! how brave you are."

"Why should I be anything else?"

"I am terrified. I wish I had never bought the creature," said Valentine. "The man is a great cheat; he told me it would not bite, and I was stupid ass enough to believe him. Wait till I next time go there, I will speak to him."

Sir Cotton Sanders had dexterously caught the squirrel on its way to unknown regions, and treated it to speedy execution under the jurisdiction of Judge Lynch, who was supposed to preside over the summary process. Its neck was dislocated in an instant, and only a tiny wail came from the fur-coated vixen to tell the world without that it had come to a violent end. This scream or squeak was heard by Skittles, and satisfied her that she had

nothing to fear, so that she became braver than ever, and said—

“I rather fancy the little thing has gone up the chimney. Perhaps he is fresh from the woods and new to the civilization of cities. It was frightened, you may depend, or it would not have behaved as it did.”

“Well, you are very courageous,” said Valentine St. Roche. “I do not know one woman of my acquaintance who would not have run all round the room rather than have had such a thing under their dress.”

Lisette continued to squall and squeal like a whipped child, so her mistress exclaimed, in an angry tone—

“Leave the room—*allez vous en*—go this instant and get your hand dressed—away with you.”

Lisette grumblingly departed.

Valentine sank into a chair, and the dog she had hitherto held on her arm jumped upon the floor and ran about, smelling first this and then that, as dogs will do when they give the rein to their imagination. Here was the source of a new danger, which Skittles did not underrate when she said, in a tone of annoyance—

“Call your dog away. If people only knew how much I dislike animals they would not bring them to my house.”

“Here, here,” cried Valentine. “I am very unfortunate to-day. I can please nobody, and my hand hurts so that I could sit down here and cry for an hour.”

"Believe me, it is a mistake to buy dogs."

"I like them."

"Other people do not."

"I was not aware of that fact when I brought them here."

"Had you not better go and have your wound looked to? I have been told that the bite of a squirrel is a very dangerous thing, and may be attended with disastrous results, such as you may not exactly like. Take my advice, and pick up your dog and run away. Shall I call Rosine to show you to the street door and call a cab for you?"

"Oh, no; a little hot water will do very well."

"We have none."

"Cannot the servant put a kettle on the fire?"

"Rosine is busy."

"I am sorry that I should have intruded upon you at so inopportune a time."

"So am I."

"You shall not again have cause to complain."

"All the better."

"I shall go, and for ever," said Valentine St. Roche, in a great passion.

"Take your dog with you."

"Oh, yes! do not fear."

Valentine got up, and binding a pocket-handkerchief round her hand, approached her dog, which ran away from her and took refuge, as did the squirrel, under Skittles' dress. Valentine wished to put her hand underneath to get him out, but Skittles said—

"Do not put your hand under my dress!"

"Give me my dog, then?"

"I can't be bothered now."

"You are doing nothing."

"That is my business. Take your hand away."

"I shall not!"

"Then I will make you!" exclaimed Skittles, giving her a push, which sent her reeling against a sofa; on her way she caught hold of a table-cloth to save herself, and pulled over, in a great ruin, a handsome lamp, a bowl of gold-fish, and a number of valuable books, which the water from the bowl spoilt for ever.

"Clumsy beggar!" exclaimed Skittles, much annoyed.

She had imagined that after so decided a rebuff, Valentine would go away, and trouble her no more. But she was mistaken; she had formed an erroneous calculation, based upon a false estimate of Valentine's character. The French woman was fiery as a lion, and well able to take her own part; in addition to which she had plenty of pluck, and did not for a moment hesitate to take the initiative when she felt herself aggrieved, and thought that her wounded honour required avenging.

Jumping up as soon as she was able, she put her injured hand behind her, and rushed at Skittles, hitting out with the other, and striking numerous blows right and left at random. One of these was sufficiently violent to disturb Skittles' equilibrium, and, reeling towards the coal-scuttle, she sat down, against her will, upon that receptacle for black diamonds, and the unhappy Sir Cotton

Sanders, like a devotee at his prayers, was revealed upon his knees. His hair was a good deal rumped, his face was as red as a peony, and in his right hand he held the dead body of the wretched squirrel he had killed.

Valentine looked at him with amazement; she became speechless, and unable to articulate through rage. Sir Cotton did not know what to do; he remained kneeling, turning first to one and then to the other, as if invoking the mercy of the rival goddesses. It was a scene well worthy of the genius of a comedian. Oh, for Molière, Sheridan, or Scribe, to have seen it! Skittles continued to sit on the coal-scuttle — serene in the midst of the storm. Valentine, nearly choking, reeled towards the sofa, and sat down beating her breast, as if to make her lungs inhale air more freely. At last, the intense absurdity of the whole affair struck Skittles, and she burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, which rang through the room. At first her face had crimsoned a little at the idea of a man being found under her petticoats, but with her usual assurance, she soon dismissed her modest scruples, and enjoyed the joke as much or more than anybody else. When her boisterous laughter had subsided a little, she exclaimed —

“Don’t sit there, man-alive, as if you didn’t know what to do with yourself. Get up and smoke, and make yourself jolly. Give me a glass of wine; for I’ll be shot if I don’t want it after this little bout. Don’t be in a blue funk, if you have made a fool of yourself. People can’t do more than

laugh at you ; and a little good-natured ridicule won't kill you. I should think a man of the world ought to be able to stand chaff as a soldier stands fire."

Sir Cotton Sanders got up, and felt inexpressibly thankful to Skittles for breaking the horrible silence which had reigned supreme since the *dénouement*. He went to the *buffet*, and got out a bottle of wine, poured out a glassful, and handed it to his saviour. This act of complaisance was like heaping coals of fire upon Valentine's head, and enabled her to find her tongue, and, when found, she made good use of it.

"I did not know why you were so particular about not moving yourself," she said.

"You know now, then," responded Skittles, with composure.

"You are *une vache*."

"What?"

"What you say—one cow."

"Cow, am I! I'll cow you if you say that again."

"You are one bad woman, and I shall not stay to talk to you ; I shall go way with Sir Sanders."

"Will you? I don't think so. Sir Sanders, as you call him, doesn't want to have anything to do with you."

"Yes he does. He is my *chère ami*."

"Is he! if you want to be enlightened on the subject, ask him."

"Sir Sanders," exclaimed Valentine.

"Ye-es," he replied, in a hesitating manner ;
"will you have a glass of wine!"

"Not here? it would choke me. Come—I am going."

"Good-bye."

"What!"

"You will get a cab outside."

"Oh! Sir Sanders," said Skittles, with mock surprise; "you ought to know better. Are you not ashamed of yourself, to talk to a lady in that way?"

"Ah! ah! you laugh at me," cried Valentine, trembling with rage; "you both laugh at me, but I will have my revenge. Oh! yes—yes—yes!"

And so saying, she swept furiously from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS NOTE.

A FEW days after the ignominious exposure to which Sir Cotton Sanders had been subjected by the impetuosity of Valentine St. Roche, Skittles was walking up the Rue Castilione, when a stranger brushed hurriedly past her, stopped, looked into her face, and then without a word thrust a note into her hand. Her feminine instinct prompted her to retain possession of the note, and she did so, placing it in her pocket, resolving to look at it and read it when she reached home, which she did not do for an hour or so. She found lunch ready for her; and Sir Cotton Sanders, whom she had invited, and who in reality was now *ami de la maison*, was waiting her arrival with some impatience. She had not seen him since the *contretemps* related in the last chapter, so of course the conversation turned upon that interesting event.

"Have you seen Valentine?" was her first question after their greeting was over.

"Once only."

"You called upon her?" she queried, in a tone of reproach.

"No ; I met her quite accidentally in the street."

"What did she say?"

"First of all she abused me ; then she spooned me over ; and lastly she went away threatening all sorts of things."

"Ah ! let her threaten. We are not afraid of her!"

"I know her to be revengeful."

"What of that?"

"She might do you an injury."

"No fear of that ; she has not pluck enough. Besides, she knows I am one too many for her."

"I could wish you were a little more on your guard though."

"I know my way about town. Don't *fache* yourself, old fellow ; old soldiers and weasels sleep with one eye open. Are you going to take me out this afternoon?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself. Do you want to go?"

"Certainly ; order the carriage—my own ponies are tired and want a rest."

"I will go about it directly after lunch."

When that agreeable and salutary meal was brought to a conclusion Sir Cotton Sanders took his leave for a short time, and Skittles was alone with full opportunity to read her note. Drawing her chair close to the fire, she placed her feet upon the fender and drew the note from her pocket—it was neatly folded up, and written upon good paper. It was noticeable that the top of the sheet had been torn off, as if to hide the monogram or crest of the writer. The contents ran as follows—

“An ardent admirer of the beautiful and accomplished Laraquez (‘That’s a lie to begin with’ remarked the reader, *par parenthèse*) is desirous of meeting her and having the great and inestimable pleasure of a short conversation with her. The writer of this note is a firm believer in destiny, and he believes that fate has ordained that *la belle* Laraquez and himself shall be on intimate terms. Julius Cæsar was a child of fate, and so is the ardent admirer of incomparable charms—beauty, wit, and elegance, a happy *trio juncta in uno*. Have the goodness and condescension to be in the church of the Invalides at a quarter to four to-morrow, just before the gates are shut; select the back of the *tombeau*, and look down upon the marble flooring, as if venerating the memory of the great Napoleon. The writer will be there if fate shall not have decreed otherwise. The writer believes that “The” Laraquez has, like other reformers, a mission. She is the high priestess of the Hetairæ, and specially ordained by fate to work some great change or prelude some reform, whether for or against the order matters not; nor does it matter whether mankind receive her or not, for from time immemorial they have been in the habit of crucifying their Messiahs. Come!—fulfil the decree of destiny. Come!”

After finishing this remarkable epistle, and reading it from beginning to end twice, Skittles crumpled it up and put it in her bosom.

“I wonder who the fellow is?” she soliloquized.

"I shall go and see, if only for the fun of the thing. Can it be a hoax? I hope not. I will be bound all Paris is laughing at this moment about Sanders and me and that affair of Valentine St. Roche with her infernal pets—and it would be confoundly disagreeable to be scandalized twice in one week. The man whoever he is writes with consummate conceit, more like a king or an emperor than anyone else. He is a fatalist too, which is an unnatural creed, and one I dislike very much. His fatalism is correct in one particular though, and that is about my meeting him to-morrow, as he has piqued my curiosity, and I certainly shall do so."

The time slipped rapidly away, and four-and-twenty hours were gone long before she had expected they would lapse into the limbo of the past. At the hour appointed she passed through the iron gates leading to the tomb, walked sedately up the neatly gravelled road, and entered the church in which the bones of the great Napoleon rest. She scrutinized the faces of those tourists, visitors to Paris, and others who ~~were present,~~ without discovering anyone who gave her a corresponding glance of intelligence. This being the case, she sought the back of the sarcophagus and looked down upon the ground in a persevering manner, which she found rather tedious, but which she hoped would be rewarded as it deserved to be in a short space of time.

She did not appear to be much impressed by the odour of sanctity with which she was surrounded. If she was that salt of the earth with which the

earth is to be salted, it is fair to assert that the salt had lost its savour.

Suddenly a man stepped forward and advanced to Skittles. His hat was slouched over his eyes as if he feared and wished to avoid recognition; his appearance was commanding if not majestic; in his face was an air of great penetration, of unlimited sagacity. He wore the imperial and the long moustache peculiar to numbers of his countrymen; his dress was plain, though gentlemanly, and it was impossible to avoid feeling that you were in the presence of a superior man when confronted by him. Yet there was something sad about his manner and his appearance; he must have suffered much in his time, or his mind must have been over-wrought with many weighty matters and much study.

"Am I correct in supposing that I have the honour of addressing the Countess Laraquez?" he said, in excellent English, which could only have been acquired by long residence on English soil and frequent intercourse with the natives.

His voice was well and gently modulated, and possessed the singular charm of at once enchaining the attention.

"I am the lady you mention," said Skittles, carefully scrutinizing her acquaintance.

"In that case I am also correct in supposing that you have kindly come here to meet me."

"You may suppose so if you like."

"It pleases me to do so, therefore the supposition is a fact."

"The word fact reminds me of the Second Empire."

"Why?"

"Because in spite of the reactionists, it is a fact."

"Are you a politician?" queried the unknown, with a smile.

"A little," replied Skittles; "just a wee bit. Politics are so difficult to understand. I never can understand wars; ideas get jumbled together in my head—I don't know the difference between the Poles and the Confederates. Then the Pope has long been a standing mystery. *Oh! si j'avais un ami qui m'aidât.*"

"This is not a nice place to talk in."

"So I was thinking."

"If it were I would give you a disquisition upon home and foreign politics."

"With the chances of a war with England? Waterloo, you know, is unavenged."

"Now you are unkind. Moscow and Leipsic have been avenged, and the time may come—ay, will come——" His manner had grown impassioned, but he suddenly checked himself, and added, "Pardon me; let us talk about something else. Will you come with me to my house? Hoping for your compliance, I have ordered dinner."

"Why not go to those provincial swells, 'The Three Brothers'?"

"We shall be more comfortable and to ourselves at home."

"I prefer a public room."

"You shall please yourself," said the unknown; "I would rather though you fell in with my wish; I am sure you will not regret it."

"I am not usually of a yielding disposition, but suppose I say yes?" replied Skittles.

"Then I must annex a condition."

"A condition?"

"Yes."

"Conditions are tedious,"

"I grant that."

"What is your condition?"

"I have a carriage waiting outside the Invalides. When you are seated inside you must permit me to blindfold you."

"Oh, that is monstrous! I am not an *intriguante*, and I do not understand such humbug. What do you want to go blindfolding me for? Cannot you take me without?"

"*Si ma vie en dépendait je ne pourrais.*"

"How do I know you are not conspiring against me? I wish to God I could see Barossez; he would tell me what to do."

"Are you acquainted with Barossez?" inquired the stranger, with a perceptible start.

"Oh, yes! Barossez and I are very excellent friends; I rather like him. Does he know you?"

"He has always been an *enfant gâté* of mine."

"Indeed! who are you?"

"What shall I say? I am the child of mystery."

"You wish to preserve your incognito. In that case I shall photograph you mentally and consult Barossez."

"Do so; but in the meantime the carriage awaits us."

"You must promise not to abuse my confidence

You are not a police spy, desirous of taking me to La Force or the Conciergerie?"

"Do I look like it?"

"Frankly, no."

"Why then suspect me? If you were not prepared to trust me, why did you come to meet me?"

"*Faute d'argent*," replied Skittles, with a laugh.

"I will not believe that," returned the stranger; "though I could supply your wants in that respect to an unlimited extent."

"Very well; give me a cheque on account."

"I do not carry cheques in my pocket; but this bracelet is worth fifty thousand francs. Take it; it is yours."

She took the bracelet, and placing it on her arm, allowed it to sparkle there. The stones were very beautiful, and she accepted the present thankfully.

"Thanks," she said, with her sweetest smile; "I am much obliged for so handsome a present. Do you always carry valuable jewellery about with you?"

"Why?"

"You must take care if you do. How can you tell that I have not a brother a garotter?"

"In the interests of his sister?"

"Oh, no; on his own hook."

"We would find him a lodging at Caen or Toulon," replied the stranger, with a smile. "But come, the carriage awaits us. Are you ready?"

For a moment she hung back, but being a woman

of a courageous disposition and withal fond of adventure, she overcame her prudential scruples, and replied in the affirmative.

"I will go with you," she said; "remember, though, that I place the most entire trust and confidence in you; if you abuse that confidence, I shall know how to punish your bad faith."

"You shall have no cause for regret," he said, by a gentle pressure causing her to move along and near the entrance to the space before the church. A plain, unpretending-looking carriage, which had very much the appearance of being hired for the occasion, was standing outside the gates. The gentleman waved his hand to the driver, who drove up. Skittles was handed in, some instructions were given to the driver in so low a tone of voice as to be inaudible to her; the next moment the stranger was beside her.

Scarcely knowing why or wherefore, she could not conceal from herself that she felt a little uncomfortable, and this feeling was increased when her companion said—

"You must permit me to blindfold you."

"Cannot you take me to your place without all that humbug?"

"I am afraid not. It was a compact between us, you know."

"So it was; but what is your reason?"

"Secresy."

"But why?"

"That is my concern."

"You must be some tearing swell or other. I

suppose I ought to feel flattered at being in your society."

"Perhaps I have a wife," replied the stranger.

"Well, what then?"

He fixed his penetrating eyes upon her, and said—

"She might object to my bringing a casual acquaintance home to lunch."

"Is the old lady jealous?"

"The young lady is very much so."

"She is young, then, your wife?"

"Yes."

"But supposing she were jealous and all that, what good will your blindfolding me do? You should blindfold her."

The stranger bit his lip; Skittles evidently had the best of the argument.

"The fact is," she continued, "you are afraid that I shall see where you live, find out who you are, and give you some trouble and annoyance the first time I am mischievously inclined. Is it not so?"

"You have a right to your own opinion. Let us cease arguing. Will you fulfil the compact, or shall I place you in another carriage and allow you to go home?"

She looked into that earnest face to see whether or not he was in earnest, and she felt sure that he was. Being extremely curious to follow out the adventure, she complied with his request, and allowed him to tie a thin piece of crape over her eyes. Then he pulled down her veil, which was of

thick Maltese lace, so that she looked like a lady closely veiled. No further conversation passed between them until the carriage stopped. He was taciturn ; she was frightened.

All sorts of strange ideas took possession of her mind.

Was she in the power of a madman? The man's manner of conducting himself was odd and singular. Would the next act of the drama be the plunging of a knife into her heart, or the severing of the carotid artery. Who could tell?

The stranger did not give much weight to these suspicions by his conduct. He softly grasped "The" Laraquez's hand and held it between his two palms, caressing it, and wondering at its softness and beauty. She made an attempt to snatch it away from him more than once, but he would not be denied the pleasure he had proposed to himself.

When the carriage stopped, he exclaimed —

"We have arrived at our destination. When I hand you out of the carriage do not be afraid ; lean heavily on my arm, and walk as if you knew where you were going. Do not stumble ; walk bravely. No harm is about to befall you."

"Very well," she replied, laconically.

She stepped from the carriage on to what appeared to her to be flagstones with which a courtyard was paved. She walked for a short distance, and then, as her conductor stopped, she stopped also. The insertion of a key in a lock fell upon her ears ; after that the "click," which denoted that

the key had been turned in the lock, and that the door was open.

"Take care, we are going upstairs," was an admonition which prevented her falling, and advised her that the interior of a house had been reached at last.

She counted twenty-five stairs, after which level ground was touched, and she found herself in a room.

"Permit me to remove the bandage," said her companion; "we have arrived at the end of our journey."

Skittles did not make any objection to a proposition so welcome to her. The bandage was removed, and as soon as her eyes became accustomed to the flood of light which assailed them, and to which for a short time they had been strangers, she looked around her, perceiving that she was in a spacious apartment, the walls of which were closely covered with pictures apparently of great value and skilful execution. The apartment had six windows, all of which were shaded with Venetian blinds, which admitted the rays of the sun, softened and toned down, while preventing anyone from within from catching a glimpse of the exterior or the buildings outside.

Skittles contrived to get a peep through the interstices of the blinds, and fancied, whether rightly or wrongly, that she saw trees and shrubs outside, which would denote that the room looked upon a spacious garden.

The floor was carpeted with a soft and yielding

Turkey rug. The furniture was of the most elegant design and most expensive description. Each chair had a monogram upon it, but the letters were Gothic, and so intricately worked together she could not decipher them, much to her chagrin and disappointment. The table was covered with a snow-white cloth, and upon it was a magnificent repast, evidently prepared beforehand by the order of the master of the house. Everything was cold ; it was, in fact, what is known as a cold collation.

Skittles did not take off her bonnet ; she contented herself with untying the strings. Throwing herself into a chair, she said—

“ Give me some wine, old fellow. You owe me some reparation for the worry you have given me.”

“ Would you prefer some grapes ? ” replied the stranger. “ There is a conservatory at that end of the room (pointing to the south). The grapes are quite ripe, and I flatter myself they are some of the best in France. You have not better on your state vine at Hampton Court, though the latter may be more prolific. As for having caused you annoyance, the charge is a specific one, and I hasten to express my regret.”

“ Show me your vinery, and express your regret afterwards,” she said. “ I do not mind tasting your grapes to oblige you.”

He took her into a spacious greenhouse, filled with flowers and grapes. The glass side was draped with brown Holland blinds, so that she was again prevented from looking outside. The grapes hung in tempting clusters over her head, but they were

beyond her reach. Seeing her dilemma her friend brought her a pair of steps, up which she got with his assistance and plucked a bunch of the rich and ruby-tinted berries, which she ate with great satisfaction.

But with her usual caprice she soon grew tired of this amusement; and throwing the bunch, and what remained upon it, into a corner, she exclaimed—

“I’m tired of grapes; let us go back and have some champagne.”

“With pleasure. I am entirely at your service. I hope you will like my society so much that *this* will cement an intimacy of long standing.”

“Who are you?”

He made no answer.

“Will you answer my question?”

“If I were to say I am a crossing-sweeper you would not believe me.”

“Of course not. Do such people live in palaces like this? What shall I call you? Let me see; have you any distinguishing personal peculiarity? Yes, you have. It is like the beak of an eagle. I shall call you the man with the nose if you will not favour me with your accustomed designation among men.”

He smiled good-humouredly, and replied—

“Allow the man with the nose to have the honour of giving you some wine.”

She drank the glass he held out to her, and soon afterwards they sat down to lunch.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN WITH THE NOSE.

HOWEVER absurd the name which Skittles had bestowed upon the stranger may seem, it was nevertheless merited; for it was one of the most preposterous nasal organs which Nature ever condemned a man to wear; it was the prince or the king of noses, if royalty in such things goes by size. Had not the face upon which it sat been so expressive, so—shall I say careworn—so sagacious, and had not the eyes been so full of deep and hidden meaning; had not such a smile of intelligence played around the mouth, she would have laughed at so outrageous a nose.

“How would you like to live in the country?” exclaimed the man with the nose.

“Not at all,” was the quick reply.

“Are you not fond of Nature’s chaste delights?”

“What are they? I never heard of them.”

“They are numerous; but I can easily catalogue them. For instance, fishing, haymaking, floriculture, and all that sort of thing.”

“Your list is not very extensive.”

“I can extend it if you wish it.”

"Pray don't ; you have not hit upon my line at all. I like theatres, balls, parties, the opera, driving in fashionable thoroughfares, and walking about in fashionable promenades, where one can see jolly people and jolly people can see me."

"*Odi profanum vulgus.*"

"What does that mean?"

"It is an exclamation of Horace, when he expressed his abhorrence of the common people."

"He was an aristocrat, then?"

"To the backbone, and one of the first gentlemen of his age."

"Is making poetry compatible with gentility?" said Skittles. "I always thought writing and that sort of thing was done by cads who get a few pounds to live upon, and that is all. One never sees literary men anywhere, and for my part if one was introduced to me I wouldn't look at him."

"Permit me to assure you that you are mistaken ; I am, to a certain extent, a literary man myself."

"Indeed ! But you do other things?"

"Oh, yes ; a great many."

"Then you are not dependent upon your exertions?"

"No."

"That is another thing ; I must say I don't like writing fellows."

"Why not ? Have you ever met any ?"

"No ; it is a prejudice that I have. There is one fellow I should like to see, though."

"Who is that ?"

"A man who has had the cheek to write my biography."

"Perhaps you would be charmed with him."

"I don't know. He doesn't flatter me. But I say, why did you ask me if I should like to live in the country?"

"For this reason—I have the most delightful little box in the country that you ever saw. If you would like it, it is yours."

"Cannot you borrow Aladdin's Lamp and transport it to Paris? I love Paris; I don't think I shall ever leave it."

"I am afraid it is a fixture."

"Ah, that is a pity! If I were to go into the country, I am positive it would kill me in a fortnight. I was always fond of gaiety, and solitude would kill me."

"That is a consummation we must avoid at any rate, for society could not afford to lose its most brilliant star," said the man with the nose, politely.

"Have you no houses in town?"

"Yes."

"Why not give me one?"

"I prefer a tame dove to a wild one."

"That is as much as to say that you would like to cage me. No, thank you; I am fond of my liberty, and if ever I renounce it, it will not be in your favour. Thanks, however, for so candid an expression of opinion."

"I may thank you for the same thing," replied the stranger.

Getting up, he walked up and down the room

for a short time, as if annoyed and not knowing what to do. Suddenly stopping, he turned on the tap of a fountain, of the existence of which she had never yet dreamt; the basin looking like some piece of antique marble brought from Nineveh or some similar place. The pretty stream rushed upwards in a glad shower of bright sparkles, falling backwards in diamond drops. A fountain in a room is a lovely object; its spray cooled the air, and the tinkling noise made by it was soothing to the senses.

"Oh, how pretty!" she exclaimed; "I had no idea that there was a fountain in the room. Why did you not tell me? It makes everything quite fairy-like. I shall have some made directly I go home."

He sat down again, and this time by her side. She made no resistance.

He sat beside her, twisting a tress of her long hair admiringly round his fingers.

"You are very charming," he said, with a protracted sigh.

"So I have been told before," she replied, not sighing at all.

"How very unromantic your replies are."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; I believe you haven't an atom of sentiment in your composition."

"I had."

"Where has it gone?"

"Oh, I don't know; fellows I have known in the world have knocked it out of me. I am thoroughly

practical, and if you want a romantic woman you had better not think of me."

"It is a pity."

"Why? Would you rather have a nonsensical die-away woman who is always lack-a-daisical, than one who is sensible and knows her way about."

He placed his arms round her waist, and drew her to him; his lips touched hers, and he pressed them fervently. She was very lovely, and, as a blush mantled her cheeks, she might have resembled Leda when the swan insinuated himself into her bashful embrace, or Europa when she was carried away by the bull.

She allowed her head to fall forward upon his shoulder, and he, placing his arm round her neck, drew her still nearer to him.

"Do you—can you love me, dearest?" he said, in a soft murmur.

Skittles, thinking that she could not go very far wrong by replying in the affirmative, was on the point of doing so, when the door of the room was flung suddenly open, and a lady of great beauty and stately demeanour appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE JEALOUS WIFE.

THE lady's beauty was undeniable, but it was the pale, fragile, and delicate beauty of the lily. She bore an appearance almost reginal in its overwhelming majesty.

Yet it was very sad.

She looked like a woman who has lavished the whole wealth of her affection upon a husband whom she finds she cannot love and appreciate as she could wish. She was tall and angular, but gorgeously attired.

"She looks uncommonly like the man's wife," remarked Skittles, *sotto voce*. "It is fortunate she hasn't a nose like him, or both ends would meet sooner than was convenient."

The lady beckoned to the stranger, but he did not seem disposed to move.

"What is it you want?" he said, in a petulant tone. "It is very odd that I cannot be alone for a few hours. Why do you not follow me to the *Corps Legislatif*? perhaps they would hail you with acclamation."

"Some day they may; not now," replied the

lady. "I have come to tell you that I will not be trifled with by you any longer ; you trample upon my affections, and treat me in the most inhuman manner ; your conduct is beyond my power of endurance."

"Was not our—our, *dame*—our marriage, one of *convenance*?" said the stranger, or "man with the nose," as Skittles called him, driven into a corner.

"No, it was not ; I utterly deny it. If it was what you describe it to be, you are the most perjured and the most worthless of men. Can you imagine for a moment that I should sit still and tacitly connive at the despicable amusements in which you indulge? I must, as a wife, protest against such things, and as long as I have a voice to uplift, I will not fail to do so."

Skittles looked up, and said boldly—

"*C'est par amour qu'il le fait.*"

"I was not addressing my remarks to you, for I am not in the habit of holding any conversation with the degraded class of women to which you evidently belong," replied the lady, with a dignity indescribable.

The stranger exclaimed, in a supplicatory tone—

"*Par charité arrêtez.*"

"No, I will not," was the decided reply in French, the language which each of the trio employed ; "no, I will not refrain from uttering my real opinions ; you have outraged me in every possible way, and I cannot tolerate it any longer. This woman," indicating Skittles, "is your accomplice in the latest outrage. If you were worthy of

the name you bear, and still more of the name of husband, you would drive her from you as you would a leper."

"Draw it mild, old lady," said Skittles, "or else you may get what you didn't bargain for—that is, a glass at your head. I can stand a little, but not too much."

"*Ce n'est pas à vous d'agir ainsi*," exclaimed the stranger, in a tone of remonstrance, addressing her who was evidently his wife. "*Il ne vous convient pas*."

She hung back a little at this, but almost directly returned to the charge, saying—

"Is not my proper place by your side? should any other woman usurp my right?"

"If the 'man with the nose,'" said Skittles, "has the good taste to prefer me to you, my good woman, I don't see why he should not exercise his prerogative."

"Be kind enough to turn this woman out," said the lady, ignoring the fact of Skittles' presence altogether.

"I am impotent in the matter," returned the man with the nose.

"Will you do as I ask you?"

"Of course he wont," cried Skittles. "Now look here; I have stood you long enough, and I don't see the fun of doing it any longer; if you don't make yourself scarce, my good woman, I shall have to show you where the door is."

"This insolence, and to me?"

"Who are you more than other people?"

"You cannot pretend to be ignorant of my husband's position."

"Of course not. If he was not somebody, you do not suppose, I hope, that I should have condescended to come here. But whoever your husband is, you are nobody, and you had better hook it."

"Will you drive me to extremities?" said the tall lady, addressing her husband.

"What can I do, my dear?" he replied.

"Oh, my God!" cried Skittles; "I wish I were a big Frenchwoman."

She began to hum the air of "Early in the Morning," and sang—

"You needn't go far for a pretty face,
Walk down Regent-street or Waterloo-place;
The great Frenchwomen, if report speaks true,
Are not particular as to what they do.
So early in the morning
Before the break of day."

"May I entreat you to be quiet?" said the stranger.

"I shall be quiet when I like, but not before. Why did you bring me here to be insulted by——"

"To oblige me, be a little moderate in the expressions you make use of."

"Well, to oblige you, I wont fling the dictionary about quite so much as usual. Only do one thing to oblige me."

"What is that?"

"Send that woman away."

Finding that affairs were approaching a crisis, the stranger rose, and approaching Skittles, said—

"If you will go away now, I will do anything for you. I thought my wife was in the country; I never imagined for a moment that she would turn up at so critical a moment."

"Are you afraid of your wife, then?"

"I am not so much afraid of her as I am afraid of a public scandal."

"A public scandal! Who are you, then? You must be some infernal cheese, or else you wouldn't funk anything of that sort; if you are, you could not have made a greater mistake than you did in picking me up, because I am fond of notoriety, even in an English penny paper of a scurrilous description."

"You will oblige me?"

"In what way? the phrase is a little ambiguous."

"By going away."

"Certainly not, until I have finished my lunch."

"I ask it as a favour."

"You may ask as long as you like, but I shall not pay any attention to your request. Give me some more wine."

The stranger felt constrained by that innate politeness for which his nation are famed to comply with her request; accordingly he took up two bottles, and said—

"Which will you take, champagne or Moselle?"

"Moselle," replied Skittles.

Before he could pour out the wine, the tall lady darted forward, and struck the bottle from his hand. Skittles flushed a little at this, but took no

particular notice. Going on to the ice-tub, she took up another bottle and opened it, saying—

“Your wife is d—— inhospitable; I suppose she is a teetotaler. At all events, you are not a bad judge of wine, for this is as good as any I have in my cellar.”

“*Your* cellar?” said the tall lady, with a sneer.

“Well, what have you to say against my cellar? It is as good as yours I’ll lay a sovereign. Ask Count de ——, and Prince ——, and the Marquis de ——, and the Duke de ——, they will tell you. Go the ‘Union,’ or the ‘Jockey,’ or the ‘Chemin de Fer’—to any of the clubs—they will tell you. My cellar will beat yours any day.”

“Is this disgraceful scene never to end?” said the tall lady, looking more careworn and woe-begone than ever, but still preserving her queenly dignity.

“Its duration is entirely dependent upon yourself,” replied the stranger. “If you will be guided by me, you will go away.”

“I cannot as long as this woman remains with you. How can you ask me?”

“She is going presently.”

“No, she is not,” said Skittles. “You brought me here, and I shall go when it suits me, and not a minute before. Do you suppose I am going to waste my time over, and be humbugged about by a fellow I never saw before for nothing? I should rather think not. I came here to be jolly, and I intend to be jolly in spite of the interruptions of your ‘woman.’”

"You dare to apply that epithet to me!" exclaimed the lady.

"I don't suppose you are much better," replied Skittles. "You are evidently not the man's wife, or you would behave in a more ladylike manner. He has told you to go away—why don't you go? I shall not rob him of his nose in your absence. If you are afraid of losing that prominent feature you had better insure it in the 'Provident Nasal Organ and Universal *os frontis* Society,' if there is such a thing going."

"Why do you not go?"

"For the best of all possible reasons—I don't choose to. If you have read *Candide*—which you will have done unless your education was neglected—you will believe with that ingenuous gentleman that this is *le meilleur monde possible*; you ought also to believe that I am the best possible woman, and that I have given you the best possible reason; and if you can't see the force of my reasoning you ought to have the best possible hiding."

The tall lady appeared to be unutterably disgusted, and at the same time much surprised, at the impudent way in which Skittles treated her. It was clear that she had not been accustomed to such treatment.

"If you do not cause this woman to leave the place I shall take steps to compel her to go," she said to her husband.

"The lady is perfectly at liberty to do as she chooses. It is clear that she considers your intrusion unwarrantable; so the sooner you withdraw

from the scene of contention the sooner she will be pleased."

"And you?"

"My mind is identical with hers," replied the stranger.

"That is enough for me," cried the tall lady, pressing her hand to her heart. "Oh! Spain, Spain! would I were again in my native valleys! You have placed the last ounce upon the camel's back, and it is broken. I go, but I leave my curse behind me upon that woman! God forgive me for doing so, for her soul must be already sufficiently laden with curses."

So saying, she tottered from the room, and slammed the door behind her.

"I beg to apologize for this unpleasantness," said the man with the nose; "but I assure you I am not to blame."

"I don't care," said Skittles, "whether you are or not; you have annoyed me, and you had better go after your wife, or your woman, I can't tell which she is. As for me, I shall go home."

"Not yet."

"Yes, I shall."

"Stay a minute."

"Not a moment."

"Don't be hasty," said the stranger, soothingly.

Seeing that she was determined, the stranger approached her, and taking from a side-table what appeared to be a bottle of scent, asked permission to place some upon her handkerchief, which request she granted.

The scent emitted a powerful odour, which she had no sooner inhaled than her head fell back, her limbs seemed paralysed, and she would have fallen to the ground had not the stranger caught her in his arms.

He laid her on a sofa, kissing her repeatedly upon her lips. She was insensible of the liberty he was taking, and slept the sound sleep which was the inevitable result of the powerful drug which had been administered to her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.

How many hours elapsed between her attack of insensibility and her return to consciousness Skittles never knew. When she came to herself evening was approaching with its leaden wings. She was still lying upon a sofa; but where? Surely not in the gilded *salon* to which she had been taken blindfolded? No; she was in a totally different apartment. With a cry of surprise she sprang to her feet and pressed her hand to her brow, for her head throbbed with an aching pain. It was so nearly dark that she could not distinguish anything with distinctness except the bell-rope, which she did not fail to pull with all the energy left her. In a short time a servant arrived.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed.

"At the Hotel B——, Miss."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

"How long have I been here?"

"Three or four hours, Miss."

"How did I come?"

"In a carriage with two horses. A gentleman was with you. He said let madame be taken great care of; place her on a sofa in her own apartments, and leave her there undisturbed till she wakes up, and——"

The man hesitated.

"Well!" said Skittles, interrogatively.

"The gentleman hinted that madame had taken too much wine."

"Has any one inquired for me?"

"Sir Cotton Sanders and Mr. Trevelyan."

"Where are they now?"

"Dining in the *salle*, Miss,"

"Let them know that I wish to see them, and let me have some brandy and soda."

The man went away thinking that Skittles had been out to some *fête*, and that she had indulged too freely in sundry potent vintages, and that in consequence she had become temporarily disabled. She herself knew that she had been drugged, but with what was more than she could determine.

The adventure of which she had been the heroine was mysterious in the extreme, and as she only puzzled herself by thinking of it, she was about to dismiss it from her mind, when her eye fell upon the bracelet which the eccentric unknown had placed upon her wrist, and allowed to remain there. The jewels sparkled and glittered as they had done when she first saw them, and she knew that she did not dream—all that happened to her was real. The brandy and soda which the waiter brought was beneficial to her exhausted system in the highest

degree. After drinking it, she ordered the candles to be lighted, and went upstairs to arrange her hair and change her dress. When she descended again, she found her guests awaiting her arrival. Sir Cotton Sanders greeted her with his accustomed cordiality and respect, amounting to veneration—Trevelyan, on the other hand, was cold and cynical.

“You have been ‘indisposed,’—so they tell me,” exclaimed.

“Either I have been drugged, or I got as tight as a bullock,” she replied.

“Pardon me for correcting you. The feminine of bullock would be more appropriate as a simile.”

“I suppose you mean as tight as a cow?”

“I did not say so. If you like to draw that inference from my remarks, you are perfectly at liberty to do so.”

“You are an impudent beast—but you always were, and, I suppose, you always will be.”

“Tell us who had the felicity of placing so distinguished a person as yourself in that supine condition, which you so beautifully express by the striking word ‘tight?’”

“Cheeks!” replied Skittles, bluntly.

“Ah! sold again. Sorry I spoke,” cried Trevelyan, with a laugh.

This slangy sort of conversation was almost unintelligible to Sir Cotton Sanders, who never could see the fun of chaff, and who took no pleasure whatever in that innocent amusement.

“If you feel well enough,” he ventured to say,

"suppose we take an airing in the Bois? It is just the fashionable time—is it not, Trevelyan?"

The latter nodded his head.

Strange as it may appear, Parisian society had imbibed a fancy for driving in the wood after dinner, between the hours of eight and twelve, in preference to going to the theatre.

"I think going to Kate's would be better fun," suggested Trevelyan.

"Kate's!" echoed Skittles.

"Yes."

"You're chaffing."

"Not in the least. Is it possible you don't know that she arrived here a week ago with a very strong team of speculating Jews, English waiters, and ditto women, not caring to rely upon the native article?"

"By Jove! I couldn't believe you at first. You quite took me all aback. I had no idea that vampires had wings, and were of migratory habits."

"The chosen people have at last entered the Land of Promise."

"After quitting the house of bondage, I suppose."

"Exactly so. I am told the thing is a great success, and takes wonderfully out here."

"Have you been to the new crib?"

"I have, but I could not tell you whereabouts it is, although I could find it. They have a French cook, and the suppers are things to admire. The brandy is good, but the cham is execrable."

"Was it ever anything else?"

"May I ask what you are talking about?" said Sir Cotton Sanders.

"Oh, yes. We were speaking of a night-house, which, for cogent reasons, has removed from London to Paris. A prophet is always without honour in his own country."

"That is true, but how does the axiom apply to a prophetess?"

"Ask Trevelyan."

"Positively, I haven't an idea on the subject," replied Trevelyan.

"I rather fancy I should like to go and have a look round," said Skittles.

"Your presence would throw a fresh and brilliant lustre over an already gorgeous scene."

"Oh, yes, I know. We can get on very well without that rot."

"Fair Babylonian——"

"You'd better be quiet."

"Was not scarlet the prevailing colour in Babylon?"

Skittles held up her glass threateningly, whereupon Trevelyan, looking contrite, walked across the room, and taking her hand in his, squeezed it.

"Is it peace? as they say in the anthem."

"If you don't look out, I'll be hanged if it won't be war, as they don't say in the anthem."

"I am dumb. Extend your sovereign forgiveness to the humblest of your subjects."

"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hand is the hand of Esau," said Skittles.

"Biblical, by Jove!"

"Why not? Is Colenso to have it all to himself, and Renan to be a monopolist? I have thought seriously lately of turning nun."

"That would be too cruel to the insignificant atoms that compose your world of admirers."

"Of which company of atomic beings you are the most insignificant."

"I beg to state once for all, that I don't admire you."

"Oh! but you did once," said Skittles, playfully.

"No."

"Not even at Liverpool?"

"No."

"Another negative?"

"Yes. I found you in your chrysalis state, and I pitied you. Having a taste for the cultivation of butterflies, I exerted my utmost skill, and, as if by a magic wand, transformed the dingy grub into a very decent sort of gaudy insect."

"Gaudy insect!"

"Well, then, neat, but not gaudy."

"Upon my soul! you're complimentary."

"About the convent?" said Trevelyan, wishing to change the subject, for a threatening fire was flashing in his fair companion's eyes.

"I am tired of my life," she replied, "and I think I should like a conventual existence."

"If you persist in your determination, I must exact one favour from you."

"And that is——"

"Simply this—that you make me your confessor."

She laughed.

"When did you return from your Swiss *chalet*?" she said.

"I did not go."

"And the little woman you spoke about when I last saw you, was she a chrysalis?"

"Very much so. I was disappointed in her. If I tell you the story, you will laugh at me."

"No, I will not indeed!"

"We went by train to Bâsle, where we stayed. In the town, Fifine raked up a brother—an Edouard—a d— *sous-officier*."

"Ah! strong language."

"Justified by the provocation I received," replied Trevelyan. "One night Edouard came post haste to say that the family grandmother was dying. Fifine, of course, wanted to go to the old wretch, and begged my permission, which was given. She never came back—Edouard made her Madame Edouard, and I came back disgusted but not disconsolate."

"That is very amusing. Fancy a woman making a fool of you!"

"Of me! there is nothing wonderful in that. I am a fool doubly and trebly distilled. Women are always making a fool of me."

"Shall I order the—the what's?—that thing you sit in when you drive about?" exclaimed Sir Cotton Sanders.

"The carriage?" suggested Skittles.

"Yes; that's what I mean."

"If you like, ring the bell for some wine, and tell some one to go to the stables—say I will have the barouche."

"Shall you not go to your house?"

"Not to-night. I think you know I always keep apartments at this hotel. It is so handy when you don't want people to know where you live."

It was finally arranged that the two men should accompany Skittles in her barouche to the Bois, where they could drive till midnight, after which they would go to the Café Kate, as it was being called, and amuse themselves for a little while. The lamps attached to the carriages gave the scene a very pretty effect, making the air look as if it were filled with gad-flies innumerable. Sir Cotton Sanders sat by Skittles' side, Trevelyan taking the front seat, which he engaged all to himself.

"*Quel dommage*," exclaimed Skittles; "poor Fifine ought to be here by your side."

"I would much rather be without her; leave her to her *sous officier*," replied Trevelyan.

"They say the fair are ever fickle: still it is hard to be jilted."

"Did it ever happen to you?"

"Why?"

"Because you seem to speak feelingly on the subject."

"It did happen once; I was thrown over many years ago, now I jilt others."

"Quite right too. If a man or a woman is so

silly as to have a heart, they deserve to have it broken as a punishment for their folly."

"Your cynicism becomes more *prononcé* every day."

"And why not?"

"Ah!" said Skittles, "who is that by herself in that carriage?"

"The hired trap?"

"Yes; is it not Valentine St. Roche? Allow me to recommend her to your favourable notice, Trevelyan."

"You are kind."

"*Her* name is not *Fifine*, but her fidelity is beyond question."

Trevelyan did not seem to be inclined to take the St. Roche under his protection. In the meantime she drove by, and gave Skittles a look which may be described as bristling with ocular daggers.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAFÉ KATE.

THE vicissitudes of royalty are as affecting as they are frequent. At one moment Robinson Crusoe is the monarch of all he surveys, the next sees him an humble individual on board a homeward-bound vessel. Nor are vicissitudes confined to royalty. Noble personages, and even commoners are subject to the universal law of change. Estates are placed in a dice-box and thrown to the winds, money is jeopardized on 'Change, and destitution prevails in what was once a hospitable baronial hall. Louis Philippe became plain Mr. Smith, and crossed the channel; if the Gallic king, why not those of lesser note? Driven from England by petty persecution, as pitiable as unmerited, "Kate"—popular personages must always submit to the abbreviation of their names—had left the white cliffs of Old England and the foggy land of her birth, to find a more congenial home in the land of the stranger, who would, it was hoped, appreciate wit, wine, and women better than the stupid English.

To the Café Kate the barouche took Skittles and

her friends. The old sort of thing, slightly Frenchified, was reproduced, though it was evident that the original was still clung to and hankered after. The ex-queen was more florid and less jocund; her misfortunes had preyed upon her mind, and the ingratitude of her former subjects—few of whom saw the force of following their royal mistress into exile—weighed upon her spirits.

The sight of Skittles, however, had a wonderful effect upon the ex-queen, who at once made room by her side for so distinguished a visitor. She was the first minister of the crown, the officer nearest the throne, what the apostle is to the high priest. A smile of kindly recognition illumined the face of the ex-queen, who spoke in tones a little hoarse—was it incipient asthma, or was it obesity? Let the faculty decide.

“My dear child,” she said, “this is an unexpected pleasure; I have inquired after you, but they told me you were in Florence.”

“I have not left Paris for months, so your inquiries could not have been made in the right quarter. It seems quite like old times to see you here; how are you getting on, and how do you like it?”

“Pretty well; I am beginning to *parlez-vous* like steam. Ask your friends if they will sit down. Will you have some champagne or Moselle?”

The “friends,” were pleased to sit down, and the ex-queen was graciously pleased to be remarkably civil to them.

“You are more than usually polite,” said Skittles,

sarcastically ; " I suppose the place isn't fully established yet, and it wont do to get in the stirrups."

" Oh, how funny you are !"

" I never used to be considered so."

Pop!

A bottle of " fiz" was open, and the tankard was handed to Skittles. Kate only half emptied the bottle, but placed it under the counter as if done with.

" The old game, eh?" said Skittles. " What's the percentage over here?"

" Well, my dear, one must live, and I don't suppose it matters to you ; if it does, why didn't you give me the office?" returned the ex-queen.

" Work it as much as you like it, I don't care," was the reply.

" Ah! I see; you must have your joke."

The room, which was not too large and spacious, was not at all full—only a few stragglers, men and women, though more of the latter, being present. It was evident that the place required to be made known to the volatile Parisians and the floating and resident English population.

" What part of Paris are we in?" asked Skittles.

" Near the Faubourg St. Honoré. This street is the Rue de l'Ame Damnée."

Turning round, as she felt a touch upon her arm, she recognised a man whom she had known in London. He was a frequenter of night-houses, and got his living by his wits ; he was in evening dress,

and had possibly been a gentleman once upon a time, for his manner was polite, if not polished; perhaps it had once been so, but the polish had worn off, leaving the exterior slightly rusty. If he saw a woman with a gentlemanly fellow, who in the language of the "school" was "likely," he "gave the wink," and if she tacitly accorded him permission, proceeded to "work his victim."

This man's name was Ratcliffson; he was one of the faithful followers of the ex-queen, who had pursued her and her fortunes across the Channel. Skittles shook hands with him and offered him some wine; the ex-queen had opened four bottles already, and was on the point of "popping" a fifth. Ratcliffson put his lips to the tankard, and placing it on the counter, said—

"Will you have some more?"

"If you like."

"This lady is with me," exclaimed Sir Cotton Sanders, thinking that the proposition about "more wine" was an infringement of his rights.

"Who's your friend?" said Trevelyan, *sotto voce*.

"You know him, don't you? You've been about enough to. I want him to 'have' Sanders" replied Skittles, in the same tone.

"Oh! I see; I thought I knew him."

"I had better introduce you," said Skittles, aloud.
"Mr.——"

"Ratcliffson."

"Thanks. Sir Cotton Sanders."

"Proud to make your acquaintance," said Ratcliffson.

Sanders bowed.

"I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll toss you for a bottle of cham," continued Ratcliffson.

"For half-a-dozen if you like."

"No; one first. I am so awfully unlucky at tossing, you may beat me."

"I am generally lucky."

"I thought so. Here's half-a-crown—you cry to me."

Mr. Ratcliffson artistically passed the half-crown from one hand to the other, and letting it fall on the counter placed his right hand over it; but he had in that hand what is variously known as the "cover" and the "bonnet," which resembles the "head" part of the coin, and exactly fits it. The piece of money has, by pre-arrangement, fallen "tails" upwards. If Sir Cotton cried "tail" the "bonnet" would be left on. If "head," it would be removed; so that his winning the toss was an utter impossibility.

"What will you have?" asked Mr. Ratcliffson, with an innocent look, which would not have disgraced a High Church curate.

"Woman," cried the baronet.

The hand was raised, but not the "cover." The "tail" part was uppermost.

"Lost, by Jove! I wonder at that. I'll try again—say half-a-dozen."

"A score if you wish it."

"Very well," replied Sir Cotton Sanders, loftily,

as if losing ten or twelve pounds was a matter of the utmost indifference to him.

This time he had "heads," but of course the result was the same; and taking a ten and a five pound note out of his pocket, he put them down on the counter. The ex-queen at once took them up and placed them in her bosom—divine receptacle. The labourer was worthy of his hire, and did not go unrewarded when the first opportunity offered.

Champagne cups followed one another in quick and gay succession. Trevelyan drank his liquor like a gentleman. Sanders became a little noisy, though not exactly objectionable.

"I don't think you would be so lucky at backgammon as you were at tossing," he said. "It is not all luck at backgammon; there is some play in it."

"Yes, there is," replied Ratcliffson.

"I shall be happy to play you a game or two."

"I would rather be excused to-night. The fact is, I have an engagement at Count Labassecour's in a short time."

"Of course you know best what you want to do. Still I should have been glad to rattle the dice with you," said Sir Cotton Sanders, in a tone of regret.

"Well, to oblige you I don't mind playing a game," replied Ratcliffson.

His appointment with Count Labassecour was, as may be supposed, apocryphal. If there were such

a gentleman in existence he was the last man who would possess his acquaintance.

"I must warn you that I don't play badly," he added.

"Nor I."

"We are well matched, then."

"So much the better," said Sanders.

"What shall we play for?"

"Anything you like."

"Ponies or monkeys?"

"Which do you prefer?"

"Oh, I am agreeable to a century if you wish it," replied Mr. Ratcliffson.

"Very well—say one even hundred," answered Sir Cotton.

A board was produced—everything got ready—and the game commenced. Skittles looked at Trevelyan and smiled. Then they both looked at the ex-queen, who also smiled. It was as certain that Sir Cotton Sanders would lose as that two and two make four. He was very fussy, very excited and important over the game. His companion had a singular knack of throwing "seizes," "cings," and "caters," and at last won easily. Not satisfied with the loss of a hundred pounds, for which he at once wrote a cheque, the baronet wished to play again, which he did with a precisely similar result. Seeing that he had been beaten twice, and thinking the amusement had gone far enough, Skittles looked at Ratcliffson in a peculiar manner, and said—

"You have forgotten all about Labassecour; you had better play again another night."

He at once took the hint, apologized for being obliged to go away, promised revenge on another occasion, and went into a room upstairs to smoke a cigar with a friend and recount his exploit.

Such is life !

CHAPTER XX.

MEETING HIS MATCH.

THE heroine of this story—it may be good, bad, or indifferent; but, as I don't care the turning of a weathercock which it is, I won't call it either—consented to make Sir Cotton Sanders happy for a short while. Valentine St. Roche would neither speak or look at her for some time, and once went so far as to try and poison her; but an unfortunate waiter drank the dose that was intended for his betters, and was taken to a hospital, where they stomach-pumped him within an inch of his life.

Skittles laughed at this in her usual airy and elegant manner. She always did laugh. She used to say that she gave her maid Violette two Napoleons a-week to “worry” for her. It was certainly a fact that neither mistress or maid took anything much to heart.

“How is it,” said Sir Cotton Sanders, “that you are always so—so—what is it the dogs are that man at the Strand sings about?”

“Jolly.”

“Yes. What makes you so jolly always?”

"Oh! I don't know what's the use of grizzling and being miserable. Suppose I run into debt here and can't get any more tick, and no fellow will keep me, can't I bolt? Can't I have a sale and make a pot to take with me and go up the Nile as Rachel did?"

"There is some philosophy in that."

"Of course there is."

"Did you ever see my—my—what's that degree of relationship which may be thirty times removed?"

"Cousin."

"Yes, of course. Did you ever see my cousin?"

"What is his name?"

"Lord Roughdiamond."

"I have heard of him, but I never met him. He lives in Paris, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Ask him to dine some day—I want to see him. I have been told that he is awfully rich and the most eccentric old fellow that ever lived."

"You have not been incorrectly informed. If you would like to see him I will ask him with pleasure."

The letter of invitation was written, and Lord Roughdiamond was gracious enough to condescend to accept it. All that people said about him was perfectly true; he was the most eccentric man that the Parisians had ever seen, and they were accustomed to eccentric personages. His wealth was undoubted, but he took care of it, although he was as lavish in his expenditure as was consistent with the amount and extent of his income. He was,

when Skittles met him, forty years of age, stout, not bad looking, well dressed, with a Windham sort of eye, whiskers, a moustache, unexceptionable houses, horses, carriages, and servants in livery.

He would disappear for a fortnight sometimes, and no one could gain any tidings of him. He would vanish into the slums and spend his time in a low place with associates still lower than the neighbourhood which harboured them.

Lord Roughdiamond could be a gentleman when he liked, but he could also be a most unmitigated blackguard. It was very seldom that the gentlemanly part of his nature was revealed to the public gaze. He was fonder of displaying the antithesis of gentility, and he succeeded to admiration. Above all things Lord Roughdiamond prided himself upon his bluntness. It was his boast that there was not a blunter man in Europe; he had fought more than one duel, owing entirely to this peculiarity. Skittles did not take much pains about her toilette; she scarcely cared whether she pleased her visitor or not. She was determined, however, to tease and torment him in every possible way. He was said to be very churlish to women, and she resolved that she would rival, if not excel, his churlishness; and yet, on second thoughts, she fancied that the best way to overcome his natural brutality of manner would be to receive his sallies unmoved and retaliate with gently sarcastic speeches, which would be ten times more effective than his ill-behaviour.

"How do I look to-day, Violette?" said Skittles to her maid.

"Oh! matam, you look ver well indeed."

"How shall I wear my hair?"

"As 'tis, matam; that de way all de Frense ladies wear de hair now."

"Are my cheeks pale?"

"Just one leetel bit."

"Get some rouge, then."

Violette skilfully applied a small quantity of rouge of the very best quality to her mistress's cheeks, saying the while—

"Ah, how I wish I was one gentlemans! What would I not do to creep leetel ways into matam's heart; if I could only get leetel loves out of it, what happiness it would make to me. Oh, yes! I would give such number presents to milady, and write de sweet songs to sing."

"I think you are a good girl, Violette."

"Me love milady moch."

"Did I not promise you my lace shawl?"

"Me tink so."

"You may have it in that case. How many lovers have you, Violette?"

"Oh, me no count them; they are so many. De way with Frense peoples is, when get fifty lovers, try and get fifty or a hundred more."

"But you can't love them all."

"Not all at once, milady. Love one at a time; love one to-day, 'nother to-morrow, or love one sometimes for whole wik, when he pleasant and get plenty money to drive one out and take to de theatre."

"You don't care about your reputation."

"I did once ; but when it was gone I thought how embarrassing it had been, and how much better I get on without it."

"That is an accommodating doctrine, certainly. Put on my coronet of diamonds."

The dinner, of course, was a very *recherché* one. Sir Cotton Sanders and Skittles waited till five minutes past the time appointed for the dinner-hour, and Lord Roughdiamond did not appear.

"This is comfortable," said Skittles, in a rage ; "a pretty nice sort of a beast your cousin is."

"I told you so at first."

"Does he mean to put in an appearance ?"

"Perhaps not. I do not like the man ; I call him a bear."

"I should think he was all that, and the rest."

"Don't blame me ; I warned you."

"I know that, but I want to see the man," said her ladyship, with a stamp of the foot.

Five minutes more slipped away.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Skittles, "I'm getting peckish, and want my rations ; I shall begin to feed, or else I shall be so ill-tempered that I shall wish your cousin as dead as a hatter, and not speak a word to him."

"By all means have dinner at once, dearest."

"It will be spoilt."

"I suppose so."

"Ring the bell, then. What a helpless man you are ; you would stand chattering like a magpie, and see me die of hunger if I'd had nothing for a month."

"Rather a long fast that," said Sir Cotton, ringing the bell.

It was noticeable that when he was talked to energetically, he left off his affected manner and his pretended loss of memory.

Dinner was ordered and they sat down ; when they had got through the first course—the dinner was not *à la Russe*, but in the good old English fashion which has been called the "cut-and-come-again"—a servant announced Lord Roughdiamond, who stalked into the room with his hat on.

"Ah !" he exclaimed, in a gruff voice, taking seat without waiting to be asked, and helping himself to a glass of wine. "Ah ! how do, Cotton, my boy ?—big a fool as ever, eh ? This your woman, I suppose ? Servant, mum ; your health—yours, Cotton."

Skittles felt inclined to laugh, but she restrained her inclination. The man's manner was so natural, that in spite of his *outré* behaviour, one could not help being more amused than enraged.

"You don't look happy, mum," continued his lordship ; "perhaps you wanted your dinner, eh ? Be better tempered after the champagne. Waiter ! bring me something to eat."

"Soup, sir ?"

"Soup ! No, none of your pig's wash for me. Give me something substantial."

While the servant was gone, he seized a dish of peas and with a spoon began to shovel them into his mouth in a wholesale rather than a retail manner. Skittles flushed, and said—

"Bring that man a plate."

"No plate. Man's all right. Like peas. Very good these ; done to a turn."

"Eat like a gentleman and a Christian," exclaimed Skittles, "if you want me to remain at the table."

"Don't aspire to gentility, mum," replied Lord Roughdiamond, with his mouth full, "and am by religion a follower of Mahomet."

"You were guilty of a solecism in arriving late for dinner, and——"

"Not at all too late—very good time."

"I am willing to make every allowance for you ; perhaps you did not know the time."

"If I were the church clock, I should tell all the parish, mum."

"I really must congratulate Sir Cotton Sanders upon possessing so gentlemanly a relation. You are quite an ornament to the peerage ; you ought to have the Garter given you, and a seat in the House of Lords."

Lord Roughdiamond looked at her for a moment, and then went on with his dinner. His appetite was enormous ; he ate ravenously.

"Do they starve you when you're at home?" asked Skittles.

"Starve me ! Not that I am aware of."

"Then you may, perhaps, have seen wolves lately. Have you paid a visit to the Jardin des Plantes, or that of the Acclimatization Society ?"

"I don't know what you mean," he replied.

"Ah !" thought Skittles, "you have not the thick

skin of a rhinoceros—you are not impervious to chaff; I have found out where you are vulnerable.”

The servants placed the next course upon the table. There was a small dish of asparagus and two small birds with it.

“Are those all the birds and the asparagus you have?” she asked.

“Yes, my lady,” was the reply, “they are both very scarce to-day.”

“Very well; place them before Lord Roughdiamond. Never mind a plate; his lordship does not use plates. I am sorry for you, Sanders; I have given your favourite dish to your cousin—you must put up with a sweetbread.”

“Never mind me,” said Sanders.

Lord Roughdiamond looked uncomfortable, and when the asparagus and the ortolans, or whatever they were, were placed before him he pushed the dish away, and drew an *entrée* towards him. It was nothing more than poached eggs and spinach, but he seemed to appreciate it.

“Take his lordship’s wine-glass away,” said Skittles, “give him a couple of bottles of champagne and a tumbler, or perhaps he would prefer it out of the neck of the bottle.”

His lordship said nothing. Skittles’ decided, and yet indirect way of attacking him seemed to perplex and silence him; he poured the wine into a tumbler and drank sparingly of it.

“Some bread,” he exclaimed.

“Bring a loaf,” said Skittles.

Turning to Sir Cotton, she added—

"There is nothing so charming as good breeding. What a fortunate thing it must be for people to have nice cousins. I wish I had a few, or one—yes, one would be enough for me."

"I quite agree with you that good breeding is essentially desirable. What do you think, Rough-diamond?"

"Why, sir, this is what I think," cried his lordship; "when I came here I expected to be treated civilly, and that lady has done nothing but bully and badger me ever since I've been in the place."

"You must permit me to remind you," interjected Skittles, "that your conduct has been anything but unexceptionable, and that if I have used your own weapons against yourself, I am not entirely to blame for having done so."

"Before your servants," said his lordship

"Was not your behaviour—insulting to a degree to me—displayed before the servants? If you have been out of the civilized world so long as to forget the manners and customs of the nineteenth century, and to substitute for them those of Otaheite, it is only proper that you should be reminded of the rules of decorum, and of what is due to a lady. Your long residence in Paris should have taught you something. I had no wish to be personally offensive to you; I simply acted in my own defence. You called Sir Cotton an offensive name, and you spoke disrespectfully of me; what mercy could you expect at my hands? If you are willing to make friends and leave off your absurd way of talking, I am ready to shake hands and be jolly.

If not I will begin again and not leave off until you have left the house; and if you refuse to go when I tell you, I shall find some means of expediting your movements."

Roughdiamond appeared to reflect for a moment, then he rose from his chair, and walking to where Skittles was sitting, exclaimed—

"I beg your pardon; I was in the wrong. I did not expect to meet a lady of sense and refinement, and clever into the bargain. I have no one to look after me, and fall into bad habits. If I stop here and get jolly I shouldn't wonder if I get drunk."

"You are remarkably candid, at all events."

"That's the best way, isn't it?"

"I think it is."

"If I do get a little top-heavy, you mustn't mind what I say."

"Oh, but I shall."

"Well, forgive me, and I'll be on my best behaviour."

"I am anxious to see what that is."

"Why?"

"Because I have seen your worst, and knowing how far you can go in one extreme, I am desirous of seeing how far you can penetrate in another."

Filling Skittles' glass Sanders said—

"Here's to the progress of civilization."

Every one laughed, but the toast was drank enthusiastically.

Lord Roughdiamond sat down again, and appeared to be completely metamorphosed. Sanders managed to whisper across the table to Skittles—

"You are certainly a wonderful wild beast tamer."

"Am I not?" she replied, with sparkling eyes.

"A modern Van Amburgh."

His lordship, in Skittles' opinion, was a little mad; perhaps his mind had been affected by too copious an indulgence in spirituous liquors, perhaps it was constitutional and hereditary. He could behave himself well, for he talked away like anyone else, told amusing anecdotes, and made himself generally agreeable. After dessert, Skittles went upstairs, saying—

"I will look after the coffee while you finish your wine."

"Pray do not deprive me of your charming society for any length of time," said his lordship.

"The duration of the deprivation entirely depends upon yourselves," she replied.

"In that case, if my voice has any weight with you, we shall very speedily rejoin you in the drawing-room."

As she went upstairs she did not cease wondering. The bear of an hour ago was completely and wonderfully converted; he was not the same man. It was to be hoped that the conversion was not too great and good a fact to last.

"I'll tell you what, Sanders," said Lord Rough-diamond; "that's a devilish nice woman of yours; one in a thousand; if she isn't extravagant, you haven't half a bad bargain."

"Oh, yes; she is very ladylike and all that, but she makes the tin fly like the very devil."

"Does she?"

"I say, what made you go on as you did when you first came? That sort of thing shows us up so infernally."

"It's my way sometimes. You know I am odd; I can be all right and square when I choose, but it pleases me to be eccentric at times. I have been drunk with a lot of students in the Latin quarter for a fortnight, and those bouts always unhinge me."

"Oh, I see. Try some of this claret."

"No; something sparkling—some Burgundy, I think. Don't let me take too much; I want to go upstairs and make a favourable impression."

Sir Cotton Sanders said nothing; he contented himself with sending for the sparkling Burgundy. He did not exactly like the enthusiastic way in which his cousin spoke of Skittles; it occurred to him that he might take a fancy to her, and make her an offer, which for the sake of his money she might feel inclined to accept. In order to avoid such a contingency, and gain him his *congé* for ever, he resolved that he should get intoxicated.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WILD BEAST.

So successfully did Sir Cotton Sanders carry out his plot, that his cousin forgot where he was, forgot all about his resolution, and about Skittles, and made a beast of himself. This was nothing new; he had done it so often that he was quite a proficient in the art at the age of forty. He drank three bottles of Burgundy, and asked for some more. Wishing to get away, Sanders replied—

“The cellar is locked up; there was no more given out. I must go downstairs and see about it; I shall not be long. Attack that Moselle on the sideboard till my return.”

He went away, and told a servant to go into the dining-room, and say that his master would not send in any more wine. Sanders himself hastened upstairs to tell Skittles what had happened.

“Well!” she exclaimed; “where is your cousin?”

She was sitting on a sofa, smoking a cigarette and drinking *café noir*.

“Blind drunk,” was the laconic, if not elegant remark.

"That is your fault. Why did you not look after him better. I believe you are almost as bad yourself; you leave me up here all alone, and drink till you are stupid. God knows you are ass enough at any time. I don't like such treatment."

"It was not my fault, dear," said Sanders; "I did all I could to stop the beggar from imbibing, but it was no good; he is a perfect sponge. I told the man just now to go into the dining-room and say that I would not send in any more wine."

"More fool you, then," retorted Skittles; "that was the very worst thing you could do. The man will as likely as not smash the place up. Remember you are living in my house, if you are keeping me."

"I did it all for the best."

"I wish rich men were not nine out of ten fools; how much jollier it would be for the women."

Just at this crisis a loud crash was heard, as if the dinner-table had been upset. Skittles ran downstairs, followed by Sir Cotton Sanders, whose heart was in his mouth; he fully anticipated a disturbance, and as he was a mild milk-and-water man, he would rather have gone a thousand miles that night through a pneumatic tube than have witnessed it. There was, however, no escape for him, so he was obliged to put up with it.

When Skittles neared the bottom of the flight of stairs, she saw a be-plushed and liveried servant running through the hall as if for his bare existence, the powder was flying from his hair in clouds, and he uttered shrill cries, indicative of terror and dismay. John Thomas was in deadly peril; he

had been vigorously attacked in the seat of honour and he held discretion to be the better part of valour.

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Lord Roughdiamond at the top of his voice; "what do you mean, you d—— plug-ugly, by telling me that I can't have any more wine. Get out, you contemptible cur, if you don't want every bone in your rascally body broken. Tell your master I want him."

"Please, my lord, it was master's message," said the man, stopping when he saw his master and mistress near enough to protect him.

"Was it? so then you're a couple of d—— plug-uglies, and you may tell him so, with my compliments."

"But, my lord——"

"Don't stand arguing the point with me. Get me some sparkling Burgundy, sir, or I'll be down upon you like a beaver."

"Will you speak to him, my lady?" said John Thomas, looking beseechingly at Skittles.

"Yes, yes; leave him to me, and go and bring the wine he asks for," she replied in a low tone, leaning over the banisters to speak to him.

Although Lord Roughdiamond did not hear what she said, he heard her voice, and that caused him to turn his head in that direction.

"Ah, madame, are you there?" he exclaimed. "It is fortunate for that other d—— plug-ugly, my cousin, that you are between him and me, or I

would tear him limb from limb. Am I to be insulted in this way? am I to be asked out to dinner and then told I can have nothing to drink? G——d—— my eyes, madam, it's a little too bad."

"Don't mind him," whispered Sir Cotton Sanders from behind; "it is his way; he always G——d——'s people's eyes and calls them 'plug-uglies' when he's drunk."

"Go away, go upstairs, go out, go anywhere; leave us alone; the sight of you riles him," replied Skittles.

In obedience to her request, Sanders returned to the drawing-room, lighted a cigar, and did a sulk after the most approved fashion of weak-minded men who are unfortunate enough to get hold of strong-minded women.

"I appeal to you, ~~madam~~," said Lord Rough-diamond, leaning against the wall, "whether it is not too bad to be told one cannot have any more wine when one is half-sprung. Why I could afford to buy up half the wine in Paris. I don't like such a flagrant abuse of the laws of hospitality."

Here he paused for want of breath, almost immediately resuming with the exclamation—

"The d—— plug-uglier!" and he shook his fist after the retreating figure of the waiter.

"It is very annoying indeed. They are a couple of stupids," replied Skittles. "They don't know how to treat a gentleman. Come back to the dining-room with me, and you shall have as much wine as you like."

"That is right ! that is what I like !"

"Shall I give you a little sport?" continued Skittles.

"Thank you."

"Take my arm."

He did so, and they re-entered the dining-room. Skittles met the waiter at the door, and took the two bottles of wine he had away from him, carrying them herself to Lord Roughdiamond, and, in doing so, she exercised a wise discretion ; for in all probability the presence of the waiter would have created a fresh outburst of temper on the part of his irascible and intoxicated lordship.

"Allow me to be your Hebe," she said, "for once—just for once."

"Delighted, I'm sure," replied the wild beast, mollified at the prospect of wine.

"Only for once. I am not in the habit of waiting upon gentlemen, even if they are peers of the realm. They are only too glad to wait upon me."

"So I should think."

She drew the cork lightly, and poured out some wine.

"Confess, now, that I am a neat-handed Phyllis?"

"Very much so. It is delightful to be waited upon by you. I wish I could engage half a dozen like you."

She gave him the glass, but he would not drink the wine. He handed it to her, saying—

"Will you not do me the honour?"

"With pleasure."

She drank, and handed him the bottle, which he emptied into a finger-glass destitute of water, and drank off at a draught. This so elevated and exhilarated his spirits, that he placed his arm round her waist, and attempted to kiss her. She repulsed him gently, saying—

"You mustn't do that—my husband is upstairs."

"Husband be hanged!" he said, "I know all about that."

"If you are going to insult me, I shall run away."

"If you want a husband, you can have me."

"You!"

"Yes, why not? I'm not a bad sort when I'm well managed, but I don't like to be—be—I—I can't put my ideas together to-night. Look here. I've got eighteen thousand a year, and—and I only want looking after. Give's more wine—there's a bird. I wish you hadn't been there just now, or—well, no. You wouldn't have been here now, if you hadn't been there then. Oh, those d—— plug-uglies!"

Skittles gave him some more wine, and he drank it with the same avidity. She then purposely refilled his glass, and the last dose overcame this vino-Samson, who fell back in his chair, his eyes closed, his jaw fell down, he snored heavily, and was in a drunken stupor.

"Ugh! the beast!" ejaculated Skittles. "How I hate drunken men! I suppose there must be such things in the world, and I would rather a man get tight every night of his life than be a teetotaller."

So saying, she wended her way upstairs.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAGED ANIMAL.

IN contradistinction to the wild beast downstairs, Sir Cotton Sanders may be called the caged animal. He had put his head into a noose rather more uncomfortable than that of the matrimonial order, and he had not pluck enough to assert his authority whenever opportunities or necessities arose for his doing so.

Having disposed of the wild beast, her ladyship went upstairs to settle the caged animal, who was still lying on the sofa with a cigar in his mouth in a high state of sulk.

"You might have the civility to get up, I think," she said, on entering.

He rose, walked to the fireplace, sat down, placed his feet upon the fender, and taking the poker in his hand, beat a monotonous tattoo on the bars of the grate.

"You seem in a nice sort of temper," she continued.

"Enough to make me."

"What's enough to make you?"

"The way you go on."

"How do I go on?"

"Oh, you know well enough ! Here have I been all by myself, while you were talking to that beast downstairs."

"You are quite right ; 'it' is a beast," she replied.

A pause, during which the bars were knocked about more energetically than ever. Skittles looked angry, and the domestic horizon was becoming decidedly clouded and gloomy.

"I wish you would put that poker down," she exclaimed. "You know nothing worries me so much as your fidgetting and humbugging about with the poker."

Sanders dropped the poker, which fell with a crash. In order to console himself for the loss of his toy, he began to whistle some popular air. The infliction of this misery Skittles stood much better than he had any right to expect ; for her forbearance lasted fully a minute and a half—at the expiration of which time she said—

"You know I hate whistling."

"What the devil is it you do like ?" he inquired, with a ferocious laugh, highly suggestive of the caged animal—angry, but in dread of the lash of its keeper.

"I like a gentleman. Gentlemen are so jolly ; they never give themselves airs as you are doing at present."

"I am doing nothing of the sort," he said
"There isn't a more submissive man in the world

than I am. You tell me to go upstairs, and I go. You tell me to get up from the sofa, and I do it; to leave off knocking the bars with the poker, and I say nothing; to cease whistling, and I don't murmur."

Here he smiled with an amount of irony that was petrifying.

"And so you ought to," replied Skittles. "Is it not a man's duty to humour a woman? I'm sure it's very little petting or kindness I get from you. Any other man would have had innate delicacy enough in his composition to tell him that, after the scenes I have gone through downstairs with your drunken relative, I needed some pity—some sympathy—some rest. But what do I get?—absolutely nothing! There never was a poor woman so much to be pitied as I am."

"I think it very unfair of you to make all those charges against me," said Sir Cotton; "because I have done nothing whatever but obey you. You are very arbitrary with me, and I am getting——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Well?"

His lips moved, but no word issued therefrom.

"Speak out, old fellow," said Skittles, with a defiant laugh. "Don't be afraid of me. Be a man. For God's sake be a man, and don't be afraid of a woman."

"I was going to say I am getting tired of it."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

This was said emphatically.

"You have your remedy."

"What is that?"

"Tell your man to pack up your traps, and go away. I shan't tell any fellow I kicked you out. I shan't take the trouble to go the round of the clubs and say that you were such a consummate ass I couldn't stand you any longer. Don't alarm yourself. You are not worth so much bother."

"If you were to say all those things you would not be telling the truth."

"Who said I should?"

"You implied it."

"No, I beg your pardon," said Skittles; "but suppose I were to say all those things, and you were to deny them, who would men believe, you or me?"

"Myself, I should think."

"I like your impudence; and why should you suppose so?"

"I never told a lie that I am aware of; and what is the use of a good reputation if people are not to believe you when you make an assertion?"

"I am afraid we cannot agree. You have spoken about, or hinted about, a separation. As far as I am concerned it can take place at once—to-night—now."

"I—I did not say anything about separating," he replied; "you mistook me—indeed you did."

"I don't care whether you mistook me or not; I want to separate."

"Talk about it to-morrow," said Sir Cotton.

"No, to-night. Perhaps I shall be in a better temper to-morrow morning, and that will make me

irresolute. I am better alone. I am only ruining myself over you."

"Oh! I like that," he said, with a laugh. "I was looking over my pass-book to-day, and I find that I have spent within the last six weeks ten thousand pounds."

"More fool you. If you can't afford it I don't want you to spend it. How often am I to tell men that they need not bring themselves to Clichy or the Bench about me? Since you have been counting your money—which is a thing that only a city cad would do—you had better go back to London to your mother, and ask her to take care of it for you."

"I wish you would be serious now and then, and not chaff so much."

"I am perfectly serious."

"It doesn't look like it."

"In what does my levity consist?"

"In talking about my leaving you."

"That is what I am most serious in. You started the subject, and I am not going to be threatened by any man. This is my house—go out of it—I tell you to. Don't be obstinate and say you won't go till it suits you, or anything of that sort, because it will make it unpleasant for both of us."

"Pray don't think for a moment that I should be so rude. I know very well this is your house, and since you assure me you are in earnest I will leave it at once," replied Sir Cotton Sanders, quietly.

"Very well; do so."

"I thought that while my purse was at your service, not only for your current expenditure, but for the payment of your debts, I had some slight claim upon your kindness ; but since you tell me it is all over between us, I will put on my hat, leave the place at once, and send for my luggage in the morning."

Skittles nodded her head in a careless manner.

He walked over to her, and took her hand as she was lying upon the sofa. Finding she made no resistance, he sat down by her side, and bending over her face kissed her.

"You will know how much I loved you some day," he said.

"Indeed !"

"May I kiss you again ?"

"As your purse was at my service not only for my current expenditure but for the payment of my debts, I suppose you have some claim upon my kindness," replied Skittles, repeating his own words uttered a few minutes before.

"How chaffy you are," he said.

Finding that he might venture to repeat the liberty he had taken, he kissed her again, and would have covered her face with kisses had not the door opened, admitting somebody. A familiar voice exclaimed—

"Beg your pardon if I intrude ; thought I might venture to come up without the formality of pasteboard and slavey, being *ami de la maison*, and all that sort of thing."

Sir Cotton Sanders jumped on one side, and as-

sumed a rigidly erect position near the fireplace. Skittles turned her eyes languidly towards the new comer, and smiled a welcome. Sanders, on the other hand, looked daggers at him.

It was Trevelyan.

"Ah ! how do you do, Trevvy ?" said Skittles, abbreviating his name. "You have just come in time to talk to me and make me happy."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure. I should have been here before had I not been delayed."

"In what way ?"

"You know, I suppose, that one of the last swell things to do is to go to fires and ride on an engine, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes."

"Well, I belong to a private club called 'Les Gens d'Enfer.'"

"Do you belong to 'Les Gens ?'"

"For some time."

"Then you know Gortz Blazon and De Mabilie Piquand ?"

"Intimately. Gortz was with me this evening. I must tell you we keep a private fire-engine and an observatory. We have also telegraphic communication with every parish. The men are always in readiness, horses always harnessed, &c. Three hours ago I was in the smoking-room of the club when news came that three houses in the Rue de Château d'Espagne were on fire. Gortz Blazon and six other men besides myself immediately attired ourselves in helmets and armour, à l'An-

glaise, and mounted the engine. The engine drove——”

“How jolly.”

“We had the satisfaction of arriving first at the scene of action—put the fire out before any other machine arrived—saved three lives, and were heartily cheered by a grateful populace.”

“You have had excitement enough, then, for one night.”

“*Ma foi*, no. Excitement is a good thing. How is it possible to have too much of a good thing?”

“I wish you could manage to take me on your engine some night.”

“What is more easy? You would have to be in the neighbourhood of the club, then.”

“Is not your gallantry sufficiently great to induce you to call upon me?”

“We might lose time, and *tempus* is everything. Why not start an engine of your own, and call it the ‘Skittles?’ That would be grand. immortalize me, oh ye gods, for the idea! The King of Margate might make you the queen of that fashionable watering-place.”

“That’s rot about Margate; but I think I will have an engine. Have you seen my new park phaeton?”

“Were you out in it to-day?”

“I was. Were you in the Bois? I did not see you.”

“But I saw you, although you would not look at me; and a man I knew came by and said, ‘What a humbug Trevelyan is; he pretends to know

Skittles and she will not look at him.' I curbed my rising ire and put my resentment in my pocket."

"Did you see the phaeton?"

"Yes; and a very neat turn-out I took it to be. Who is the builder?"

"You know him; I forget his name at this moment—the man who invented the miniature brougham."

"Where does he hang out?"

"In Long Acre."

"Oh! you mean Strong?"

"That's the name—Strong. The trap is not at all bad, is it?"

"On the contrary; it will make the owners of the Paris waggons and coaches cry with envy. I say——"

"What?"

"Where's Sanders?"

"Isn't he here?"

"I don't see him."

"Then he has gone," replied Skittles, carelessly.

She had not noticed his departure, nor did she mind it now that she knew it was a fact.

"Have you had a split? I thought I saw him spooning you over when I came into the room."

"He was taking his farewell."

"Oh!" ejaculated Trevelyan; "was it a case of sack?"

"I simply told him to go, that was all. But you needn't mention the circumstance anywhere?"

"No."

"Not at the clubs for instance."

"Certainly not."

"Don't tell Valentine St. Roche, if you should meet her."

"Not I."

"And above all things, keep it dark from Gortz Blazon, and the Gens d'Enfer fellows ; they are such dreadful chatterers."

"Don't be alarmed," replied Trevelyan.

"Then I can rely upon you?"

"For ever."

"Thanks. By the way, did I show you my drunken man?"

"That I can safely say you did not."

"Then you must see him," said Skittles. "Follow me downstairs ; he is great fun—you will laugh at him ; he is a perfect bear."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

TREVELYAN followed his leader with alacrity, wondering who in the name of fortune the drunken Corydon might be. Skittles knew very well that Trevelyan would circulate the story of her having ejected Sir Cotton Sanders, and that anything he might say to the contrary would be disbelieved. She was fortunate in one respect, and that was she could not love. Hers had never been an amorous disposition, and what little love she had ever indulged in had been cruelly trampled upon and ill-used. The only feeling of which she was the possessor was a liking for old friends and faces. Trevelyan was one of her oldest friends. She had no actual and positive reason to like him, yet for the sake of "auld lang syne" he was always welcome whenever he made his appearance.

Lord Roughdiamond was still asleep in his chair. The candles cast their garish light upon his face, the principal part of whose furniture was a nose which was chiefly conspicuous for a determination of blood to its tip.

"Here he is," exclaimed Skittles; "as happy as a bird, after his second bottle of champagne, and his fifth or sixth of Burgundy."

Trevelyan regarded him curiously.

"Do you know him?" she continued.

"Don't I know him!"

"Is he a member of any of your clubs?"

"God forbid."

"Why do you say that?"

"He is Lord Roughdiamond—a great blackguard, and as mad as a hare in March through the quantity of alcohol he takes."

"Is that all?—in that case a clever woman would be able to reclaim him, and make him a decent member of society."

"I should decidedly think so."

"Would you, really?" asked Skittles. "I want your candid opinion; it may be of use to me."

"I reiterate what I have said; he is a spoilt child. His income is very large, being nearly twenty thousand pounds a year I have been told, and the best proof of his not being actually insane is that he never touches the principal, never mortgages an acre, though he spends his income in the most lavish and frequently absurd manner. If he gets into bad society he always comes out unscathed, so that he must have his wits about him whatever his defects are."

"Shall I wake him?"

"I would not," said Trevelyan; "let him sleep on the floor—he is used to that sort of thing. I

will unfasten his necktie, and place him comfortably with the hearth-rug under his head."

"Very well ; please do so."

Trevelyan no sooner received permission than he at once began his task. He untied his lordship's necktie, unbuttoned his waistcoat, placed him on the floor, and disposed him for the night.

When all was satisfactorily accomplished, Skittles sat down and negligently plucked the berries off a bunch of grapes. Trevelyan lighted a cigar, drank some wine, and assumed his favourite attitude near the mantelpiece.

"Are you well up in the Peerage?" she exclaimed.

"Tolerably so ; why do you ask?"

"Can you answer me a question?"

"How is it possible for me to tell until I hear it?"

Skittles bit her lip, and reflected a moment before she proceeded ; then she said—

"Has that prosaïc brute any other title?"

"Do you mean, has Roughdiamond any other baronies?"

"Yes ; I suppose that is what I mean."

"If you have a Debrett, I can tell you in a moment."

"I think there is one somewhere ; if not a Debrett, it is a Peerage of some sort, but it is an old one."

"What does that matter?" said Trevelyan, raising his eyebrows.

"Oh ! I forgot for the moment. I thought Peerages were like almanacks, and ought to be re-made every year."

After some search a Peerage was found, and Trevelyan referred to the name of Roughdiamond.

"Here it is," he said; "listen:—'Ernest Scudamore, seventh Lord Roughdiamond, of Glenastoe, Berwick-on-Tweed, also Baron Harkaway, of Harkaway, county Devon.'"

"That's better."

"Which?—Harkaway?"

"Yes. Can he change his title, and call himself Harkaway?"

"I presume so; but as I am not a swell at that sort of thing, I will not say positively. It is his name, so I don't see why he should not. If the House of Lords would only have him in his name of Roughdiamond, it does not follow that he cannot assume that of Harkaway for his private use."

"Thanks; your opinion perfectly coincides with mine. Give me a light for my cigarette."

"With pleasure."

"How does Harkaway, Lady Caroline Harkaway, sound?"

"Like going across country, chimney-pot hats, bull-finches, five-barred gates, tally-ho! and all that."

"That does not make it any the worse."

"Oh! by no means," replied Trevelyan. "It is what is called 'in keeping' with your avowed character. Do you mean to insinuate that our sleeping Adonis likes you?"

"I believe so."

"And you—do you like him?"

"I like his eighteen or twenty thousand a-year

I don't care a straw for him, and I don't suppose I ever should. What is there to like in the man?—ask yourself. Could any woman conjure up the smallest amount of affection for such a wine-tub?"

"Candidly, I don't think they could until reformation sets in, and that is not to be looked for in a single night. I have heard stories of him which prove that there are traits in his character worthy of notice, and even admiration, but I am inclined to think that the work of reformation would be long, laborious, and insufferably tedious."

"Be my Mentor," replied Skittles, playfully; "give me the benefit of your advice."

"Yes."

"Tell me, shall I marry him?—I can do it to-morrow, if I like."

"Can you?"

"I think so."

"Is he not the best person to ask?" said Trevelyan.

"Certainly not; he will ask me. What nonsense you talk to-night! Shall I ask him now, drunk and stupid as he is? I will, to prove the absurdity of what you have said."

Looking at Lord Roughdiamond, she said—

"Lord What's-your-name, will you marry me?"

What was her consternation, and Trevelyan's surprise, when the eyes of the drunken man opened simultaneously with his mouth, and he said—

"No, I'm d—— if I do!"

"Oh! Trevelyan, fancy that the fellow wasn't asleep," she exclaimed.

"No, my little darling, the fellow sleeps like a weasel ; that little nap on the chair sobered him," said Lord Roughdiamond. "But, thinking he would hear what you had to say, he pretended that he was still insensible, though not quite such a 'prostrate brute' as you called him. It is a pity you can't love him and can't conjure up an atom of affection for him, because it is so likely to break his heart. Poor fellow ! he can't get anyone to fall in love with either him or his eighteen or twenty thousand a-year, and he is disconsolate in consequence."

"Oh ! hold your tongue," said Skittles, getting as red as fire.

"Then, you know, he is such a wine-tub."

"Go away."

"I am going directly ; but are you sure you could marry him to-morrow ?"

"Will you leave off ?"

"No ; I don't see why I should. You have had your fling at me, and it is now my turn."

"Trevelyan, will you put that man out ?"

"Trevelyan will be wise if he leaves that man alone ; for, whatever his strength may be now, he can hold a pistol to-morrow," replied his lordship.

"I have no wish to resort to violence," said Trevelyan ; "but you have heard this lady ask you to leave her house."

"I know I have."

"As a gentleman, you ought to at once comply with her request. If you do not, you place me under the unpleasant necessity of compelling you to do so."

"Neither you nor any other plug-ugly shall put me out when I don't choose to go."

"If you behave like a blackguard, you must expect the treatment that blackguards receive."

All this time Skittles had been ready to cry with vexation. Such a *contretemps* had never happened to her before. She would in a few hours be the laughing-stock of all who knew her. The idea was intolerable. It suddenly struck her, that if Trevelyan quarrelled with Lord Roughdiamond, and kicked him out of the house, anything he might afterwards say would be put down to a malicious and vindictive feeling prompted by revenge, so she said to Trevelyan—

"If you have the least regard for me you will turn that man out. I shall be eternally indebted to you for your kindness—would you oblige me?"

Trevelyan hesitated a moment.

"Don't you hear Lady Harkaway speaking to you?" shouted Lord Roughdiamond, who had risen to his feet, and was boldly helping himself to some wine.

"For the third time, my lord," exclaimed Trevelyan, "I ask you to leave this house."

"What has it to do with you?"

"I have been deputed by its owner to do so. Will you comply with my request?"

"Flatly, I will not. Who's Lady Harkaway more than anyone else, if it does sound like going across country?"

"You refuse?"

"I do; and for this reason. It is as much my

cousin's house as it is hers. It was by his request and his invitation that I came here, and until requested by him to go I shall certainly refuse."

"Sir Cotton Sanders has left the house some time. It is a pity his relation is not——"

"Such a milksop. It *is* a pity, isn't it?" replied his lordship, helping himself to a second glass of wine.

Trevelyan's face had been growing white for some time, and the veins on his forehead had been swelling. A sudden flush, like a hectic spot, flew into each cheek, and darting forward he snatched the bottle from his lordship's hand, dealing him simultaneously a blow from the shoulder which laid him prostrate on the floor; then taking him by his heels he dragged him to the door, through that into the hall, and from thence through the front door, flinging him like so much carrion into the street. Slamming the door after him he walked back to Skittles, and stroking his moustache affectedly, said—

"He has gone out; I don't think you will be troubled with him any more."

"The beast! Fancy his overhearing our conversation. I never dreamt of such a thing," said Skittles. "I hardly know what to do. Leave Paris I must to-morrow morning. Everyone will be laughing at me. It is dreadful!"

"Another time you must not trust a drunken man."

"No, indeed ; I never was so disgustingly sold in my whole life."

"*Vraiment.*"

"Yes, indeed ; and I shall not be sorry, for I am tired of the place."

"Now is a tempting opportunity for going into the convent you were speaking about."

"I am just in the humour to do so. I will go into Italy and see how the system works there. Naples shall be my head-quarters," she replied.

"Let me hear from you, I beg," pleaded Trevelyan.

"Certainly."

"You promise."

"On my word," she replied.

"Then I am satisfied. I never lose sight of my *protégées*."

* * * *

Some weeks afterwards, when volatile Paris was just beginning to get over the loss of its "Skittles," Trevelyan was in the society of some friends on the Pelouse de Madrid attentively watching a game at "crickets" between two native clubs, when he was accosted by Sir Cotton Sanders, who said, with his usual drawl—

"How de do ? Heard anything of my old flame lately ? What's her name—deuce take it—what do you call that game you play with wood and a ball ?"

"What our lively neighbours will call 'crickets ?'"

"No."

"Skittles?"

"That's it; what's become of Skittles? No one ever hears of her now. Heard a man say a week ago that she died in Rome."

"I am in a position to contradict that," said Trevelyan.

"Indeed!"

"I had letters from Calabria and Naples this morning saying——"

"What?"

"That the Casta Diva had been captured by brigands, and that if a pot of money is not paid in a month, her ears will be sent to Ernest Trevelyan at Rue Lafitte. Now, I cannot allow her lovely ears to be mutilated—that would never do. She has given me full permission to sell her house and effects, which I shall do when this 'crickets' is over; and to-morrow I set out for Naples with heaps of money. Such is the power of friendship."

"You will save her, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. If the money is paid within a month, the lovely ears will not be cropped. I have the money, and shall be in Naples in four days."

"Mind you do not share her fate."

"Not I. Ha! that has his middle-wicket; the P.C.C. win by fourteen runs. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said Sir Cotton Sanders, adding, with a laugh, as Trevelyan disappeared in the dis-

tance—"Oh, by Jove! fancy Skittles without ears!"

As his laughter increased, it was fair to presume that he had imagined such a contingency, and was much amused at the fanciful illustration.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN NAPLES.

THE Neapolitan brigands are no respecters of persons. They have an idea that everyone is worth a certain amount of scudi, or if not, that they have some friends and connexions who are. They did not know that their last prisoner was a veritable mine of gold, and that she would pay anything almost for her ransom. Still the price they fixed was sufficiently large, because she was an English-woman ; and they thought all English people could command as much money as they wanted.

Fortunately for herself, the lovely pink-tipped ears, of which Skittles was so proud, were not shorn off ; they remained to exercise their syren influence over an army of admirers, past, present, and future.

Trevelyan met the brigand chief, paid him the money, and took away his prisoner, driving to Naples over a villanous road, and cursing the flies, which were unpleasantly audacious. At dinner that evening he was glad to remark that captivity had not impaired or taken the edge off an

appetite which was naturally the reverse of diffident.

"I am proud when I reflect that it will be recorded in history that it was my noble fate to restore to society its Skittles," said Trevelyan.

"I wish you'd been a week later," she replied.

"Why?"

"I was spooning the old chief over splendidly."

"Nonsense!"

"I was, indeed; and you will see that I shall get all my money back again."

"How, in the name of wonder?"

"Why, he thinks I'm a single woman and the Queen of Virgins."

"Of what?"

"Never you mind," she replied, blushing a little; "I can't repeat my remarks a dozen times for your edification."

"No; but——"

"But what?"

"There was an amount of *naïveté* about that charmingly innocent assertion," said Trevelyan, with a stifled laugh. "You remind me of the young ladies in actions for slander, who go into court to vindicate their fair fame, and declare that they have submitted to medical examination, the result of which puts the defendant out of court."

"Will you listen to me?"

"With pleasure."

"The chief, whose name is—as well as I can pronounce it—Hommo Pelzoni—I always called him Hommo for short, took a great fancy to me.

He thought I was an English 'Mees,' and wanted to marry me. My maid was as 'fly' as me, and she could speak a little Italian. Now, I hate their foreign lingo, and wouldn't speak it if I could."

"Praiseworthy independence."

"Is it?"

"Yes; worthy of a brick and a Briton."

"Well, my maid 'kidded' them on, saying I wanted to live in Italy, that I was of a good family——"

"Pardon me."

"What's the matter now?"

"I couldn't help thinking of my grandmother."

"How tiresome you are!"

"The reminiscence was quite affecting."

"If you chaff, I won't talk to you."

"Ah!" said Trevelyan, with a sigh, "it was a pity when that heirloom went out of the family."

"What heirloom?"

"The mangle."

"Sold again. Well, I bought it, so I suppose it's my own fault."

"But let us return to our brigand."

"I have half a mind not to tell you now—it would serve you right if I did not."

"By the waters of Pompeii we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Liverpool!"

"Now you're chaffing again."

"Pardon me, I am quoting."

"I don't like poetry; and there is no fun in parodying it."

"Again pardon me; it is not poetry—it is the Bible."

"Bother the Bible! you know it's a book I never read, and how do you suppose I'm to know anything about it?"

"Don't be irreligious."

She bit her lip with vexation.

"I am glad to perceive that captivity has improved your temper."

"You don't go the right way to improve it."

"I know that my efforts are humble, and it is not in the power of mortals to command success."

"I declare, Trevelyan, that I will leave the place if——"

"And go back to your brigand."

"Poor old Hommo——"

"And the rest."

She smiled.

"I'll lay anything he is fretting. I pretended to like him, you know, and to be romantic; and he treated me like a princess. I must say we had stunning feeds. He used to bag wine from country houses and steal sheep and things—it was awfully jolly."

"So I should think."

"The night air," she continued, "was not at all cold; so that camping out wasn't a bit worse than being at Cremorne till four o'clock in the morning."

"I did not know," said Trevelyan, "that you were celebrated for spooning men over."

"I used not to be ; but I have been getting my name up in that respect lately."

"You have?"

"Oh yes, most decidedly."

"That declaration must be highly gratifying to the general public."

"General humbug."

"Who's he?"

"Don't be a fool ; I'm talking about Hommo. My maid——"

"Pray forgive me, but is that a strictly matter-of-fact assertion, or merely a *façon de parler*?"

"Which do you think?"

"I strongly incline towards the latter opinion."

"Do you ? then you'd better find out."

"Continue to enlighten us about Hommo and the rest," said Trevelyan, sipping his claret.

"My maid worked the beggars so well that they took us for lambs."

"You?"

"Yes ; I was a lamb."

"Anything but an *agnus Dei*," said Trevelyan, *sotto voce*.

"What's that?"

"Nothing."

"I wish you wouldn't mutter as you have a habit of doing ; it's beastly unpleasant."

"But about Hommo ? We shall never come to the end of that story."

"Don't interrupt me again," replied Skittles. "At first I didn't like being a prisoner ; it felt

like being locked up and not knowing any 'bails' in the place. Have you ever been locked up from Saturday till Monday?"

"I am sorry to say I haven't had that felicity."

"Ah! I once met a man who'd only just finished doing his twelve months, and if it hadn't been for a paucity of hair I shouldn't have believed it; he was such a nice fellow, and good for any amount of cups—he was quite accomplished too."

"Ah! at oakum-picking, I presume; but about Hommo and the rest?"

"Bother Hommo and the rest! I must be discursive; I always say what comes into my mind."

"If I were only of a literary turn, I would be your Boswell."

"Who was he? I know there's a place called Boswell or Bosworth, near Market Harborough, where some swells fought a battle. But I'm telling you about Hommo; he spooned me over."

"We got as far as that before."

"Oh, did we?"

"If my memory is not treacherous."

"Well, he has promised to meet me to-night."

"Meet you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Genoese convent; he is to bring all his money with him, and we are to elope in a boat and go to Messina, in Sicily, where we can be married."

"Are you joking?"

"No, I am in sober earnest," replied Skittles ;
"what I want to know is, how safe it will be for
me to go, and whether I am justified in giving the
sbirri notice, so that they may arrest him."

Trevelyan leant his head on his hand and re-
flected.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIERY MOUNTAIN.

AFTER some deliberation Trevelyan came to the conclusion that it would not be either safe or prudent for Skittles to go to the Genoese convent.

"You see," he said, "Hommo is a knowing sort of a scoundrel, and as you have been heavily ransomed once, he may think that your friends will heavily ransom you twice; as likely as not his game is to carry you off a second time."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed; and as for having any compunction about giving the rascal into custody, the idea is absurd. I should like to have the chance. Those fellows are the curse and the pest of the country; they paralyze travelling and spoil the pleasure of tourists."

"Oh, hang tourists! I hate the vulgarians, whether they swear by Cook or Murray."

"I like them; they are fun. Now if you will take my advice, you will place this little matter in the hands of the police, have Monsieur Hommo arrested, and let the law take its course."

"He is such a nice fellow though, and behaved so politely to me, that I shouldn't like to see his neck stretched."

"You owe a duty to society."

"That duty may go to blazes ; what did society ever do for me ?"

"To the public."

"Or the public either ? I hate everything and everybody."

"Except Hommo."

"*Sans exception.*"

"You are naughty and hard-hearted ; I shall say as the governesses say to little girls, 'fie !'"

A waiter, breathless, and with signs of great excitement visible upon his features, rushed into the room, saying rapidly in Italian what, for the benefit of the untongued reader, I put into English—

"Oh ! my lord and my lady, Vesuvius is in a state of eruption. It is grand ; all the town goes to see it. You must go at once ; there is a carriage in waiting. At once go, or you lose the grand spectacle."

"What's all that ?" inquired Skittles.

"He says Vesuvius is on fire, and blazing away a good 'un."

"Oh ! that's magnificent ; we must go and have a look at it. There is nothing in the world I should like better."

Without any delay they embarked in a carriage, which happened to be in readiness, and proceeded arough the town, which was all alive with excitement.

The beggars awoke from their lethargy, and groups of galvanized lazzaroni might be seen at every street-corner talking in an animated manner. It was easy to gather that some event of importance was taking place. Every now and then some break in the houses permitted the occupants of the carriage to enjoy the splendid light of the fiery mountain in eruption. A volume of fire shot up perpendicularly into the air, and over all, like a huge pall, hung a black funereal cloud of dense smoke. The bay was alive with boats full of delighted and somewhat awe-stricken spectators. After having gone about a mile and a half, the crowd became so thick that a stoppage was the inevitable consequence.

"We have come to a standstill," said Skittles.

"Yes, it appears so."

"How provoking!"

Putting himself in communication with the driver, Trevelyan said—

"Cannot you get on?"

"No, sir," replied the man. "The throng of men and carriages is too great."

"Where are we?"

"At the gates of the Genoese convent."

"Where?" asked Skittles, who had but imperfectly heard the man's reply.

Trevelyan repeated the answer, and she said—

"Why, that is the place where Hommo said he would be!"

The clock of the convent rang out the hour—one, two, three, and on to ten.

"Ten o'clock. It is the time he appointed."

"By Jove ! that's odd," said Trevelyan.

"He said he would be near the fountain opposite the iron gates. Just look out and see if you see a suspicious-looking man in a cloak, with a conical hat."

"The conventional brigand of the stage, I suppose ?"

"Do you see any one ?"

"Do you ? The crowd is so great, and the light so bad, that I could not see a haystack a couple of yards off."

"Yes," cried Skittles ; "there he is ! Look to your left. There, there ! Do you not see him ?"

"I must confess I do not."

"Why, where are your eyes ? Look again."

"Do you mean that tall party with the Roman beak ?"

"That's the fellow !"

"Is that Hommo, and the rest ?"

"That's Hommo, if I am not mistaken. That's my prince of brigands."

Trevelyan buttoned up his coat, and stepped out of the carriage.

"Where are you going ?" asked Skittles.

"To see our friend Hommo."

"Do not be rash."

"What have I to fear ?"

"I—I don't know exactly, but I would rather you remained here."

This was wholesome advice, but Trevelyan would

not be guided by it. He promised to return soon, and walked away.

She watched and followed him with her eyes; saw him push his way through the dense mass; saw him reach the fountain; saw him speak to the brigand. There was the sound as of an angry altercation, a scuffle, loud cries, uproar, as many men talked at once—loud shouts rent the air. Trevelyan fell.

“What are they saying?” said Skittles to the driver.

He shook his head; for he could not speak English.

She jumped from the carriage, and rushed to the spot.

Trevelyan lay on the pavement, which was stained with blood. It was clear that he had been stabbed, for a long-bladed knife lay by his side. Pointing to the body, she said to those standing around—

“Go to the Hotel ——”

The name of the hotel was familiar to them, and they understood that she wished him conveyed there. She could not stop to accompany them, for her duty was plain: she must pursue Hommo, whose tall form might be seen slowly retreating in the distance.

Stabbing a man was so common an occurrence, that no one thought much of it, and the private citizens did not consider it their duty to go after the murderer.

Seeing two men in the uniform of the police, Skittles contrived to make them understand that their services were wanted ; some gold pieces caused them to exercise more alacrity. They followed, roused, first, by the gold, and, secondly, by the utterance of the magic word "Hommo," for whose capture a large reward was offered.

Following her, they overtook the brigand. Skittles made herself known to him, and he, delighted, stopped to speak to her. This was the opportunity of the police. In a minute he was seized from behind, manacled, and as harmless as a child. He cast a look of terrible hatred and malignity upon his betrayer, but he was impotent for good or evil.

* * * * *

It was a calm, still night ; a month had elapsed since the events that have been detailed ; Trevelyan had been at death's door, but by the attention and skill of his physicians, the crisis was over, and he was slowly recovering. Skittles had been indefatigable in her kind and unremitting attention. The patient was lying on a sofa in a verandah, languidly eating grapes.

"You are getting strong and well now," said Skittles.

"Yes, *grace à Dieu*," was the faint response, "I am finding my legs again."

"I have news for you."

"What is it?"

"Hommo dies to-morrow on the scaffold," she replied.

"And serve him right too. The poke he gave me with the knife was a twister that has made it a toss-up whether I lived or not. I did not at first intend to betray him; I merely wished to amuse myself with him, but—— So he dies to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"The devil's blessing be with him."

"Poor Hommo! how fond he was of me," said Skittles, musingly.

There was a pause.

"I leave here in a week, now that you are strong enough to do without me," exclaimed Skittles.

"What fair land do you intend to patronize with your fascinating presence?"

"Russia."

"I can give you introductions."

"Thank you; I am my own introduction wherever I go."

"I shall stay here during the winter. A rolling stone gathers no moss."

"Am I the rolling stone? If so, I am not ambitious of gathering such moss as you."

* * * * *

The rolling stone spoke the truth. In ten days she was *en route* for St. Petersburg.

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